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Postmodernism in therapy: meanings and concerns

Jeffrey Joseph Crane
Iowa State University

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Postmodernism in therapy: Meanings and concerns

by

Jeffrey Joseph Crane

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Major Professor

Signature was redacted for privacy.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation project seeks to confront confusion and criticism that has accompanied postmodernism's introduction into the field of therapy by identifying separate characteristics found in the professional literature and by asking three contributors to respond to criticism.

The first article examines common ideas and characteristics attributed to postmodernism as found in family therapy literature. Toward that end, thirty-one articles from seven journals were examined to identify these meanings. This research found six general categories within which comments about postmodernism were expressed. Within the core category, twenty-six separate characteristics were identified.

The second article addresses published criticism that postmodernism promotes an attitude of 'anything goes.' Speaking to this criticism are three notable contributors, Harlene Anderson, Kenneth Gergen, and Michael Mahoney. These respondents were also asked to distinguish between postmodernism and related concepts and speculate on why criticism of postmodernism continues. Among the results that the research yielded, it was found that these respondents neither utilize nor encourage postmodernist ideas or characteristics towards the promotion of an attitude of 'anything goes.'

CHAPTER 1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Postmodernism is everywhere. Glenn Ward

Postmodernists generally eschew statements that aspire to a totality and, for that reason, may take exception to Ward's comment that 'postmodernism is everywhere.' Yet even if one was to restrict his or her gaze to the local and specific, postmodernism could be found in many places (Sarup, 1993, p. 129) including family therapy. Postmodernism originated in the early 60s in relation to artistic and literary styles (Dickens & Fontana, 1994), and has since "dominated the cultural and intellectual scene in many fields throughout the world" (Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 1). Family therapy, no less than other scholarly disciplines in the social sciences and humanities, is subject to these emerging influences. At the same time, however, there is confusion in the discourse of the postmodern as a consequence of "its usage in different fields and disciplines and the fact that most theorists and commentators on postmodern discourse provide definitions and conceptualizations that are frequently at odds with each other and usually inadequately theorized" (Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 29).

This dissertation project seeks to confront this confusion and address criticism and concern that has accompanied postmodernism's introduction into the field of therapy. By way of introduction, consider for a moment the influence of postmodern thought across different disciplinary fields and the similarity of concepts found there. Many of these concepts also find expression in theories and approaches to family therapy. A modest understanding of postmodernism in the following areas will help situate its place in family therapy.

Architecture

To begin, consider architecture where features of postmodernism stand in contrast to features of modernism. Buildings constructed between the 50s and the 70s possessed, as a rule, similar characteristics. These would include the repetition of a single shape, a uniformity of design, minimal ornamentation, a flat roof, and a presence which imposed itself upon the surrounding environment (Ward, 1997, p. 16). These architectural features represented more than simply a penchant for crisp, straight lines. The aim of architects at this time "was to form a universally applicable 'modern style,' reproducible anywhere, transcending all national cultures" (Appignanesi & Garratt, 1995, p. 27).

Architects like Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and Mies van der Rohe possessed utopian dreams of ushering in a better world through a new international style (Appignanesi & Garratt, 1995, p. 27; Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 11). These individuals were motivated by an optimistic belief that through their work, architecture could aid in social development and progress. Ward (1997) suggested several beliefs that guided the work of these designers. For instance, residential housing should be based upon the same scientifically rigorous design principles that informed the construction of factories which emphasized speed and efficiency. Second, technological progress combined with the search for universal harmony and perfection was thought to be the precursor for utopian communities and neighborhoods. Third, modernism held to the principle that beauty, synonymous with purity, was found in functionality, simplicity, rationality, newness and unity. Consequently, non-functional decoration possessed no value.

Postmodern architecture, on the other hand, disputes the modernist notion that beauty is found by reducing a 'thing' to its essence or a single meaning. Instead, postmodern architecture encourages 'plural coding' which refers to a building design that fosters many different interpretations. "In this way, postmodern architecture is a democratic 'juxtaposition of tastes and world-views' which responds to the fact that we live in what Jencks[1] sees as a pluralistic, cosmopolitan 'culture of choice' rather than one of enforced sameness" (Ward, 1997, p. 23). An example of postmodern architecture is the AT&T building in New York, designed by Philip Johnson, which is said to resemble a "grandfather clock topped off with a Chippendale broken pediment" (Appignanesi & Garratt, 1995, p. 117).

Literature

Within the realm of literature, distinctions were made between types of cultures, i.e., low, high, mass or popular. These distinctions were useful for those who, like F.R. Leavis (1895-1978), considered themselves the stewards of a culture's better aesthetics. These modern critics claim a "superior insight into what is best for people ... [and] think that they know what kind of art [including literature] people ought to have" (Ward, 1997, p. 27). Ward described this elite cadre of cultural critics as opposing pop culture for its superficiality versus modern art which endeavored to reflect and encourage timeless values and traditional standards. Others, however, like Susan Sontag and Leslie Fiedler have celebrated the collapse of the distinction between high and low art and the elitist pretensions that the critics for these distinctions have perpetuated (Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 10). Ward (1997) also refers to an

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[1] Charles Jencks is an advocate of architecture postmodernism and author of *What is Post-Modernism* (1987) and *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (1991).

essay by Leslie Fiedler, *Cross that border - Close that gap*, which suggests that the modernist criteria for determining worthy literature was less a function of aesthetics than it was a matter of social class.

Where the postmodern in the arts favors eclecticism, pastiche, irony, parody, and playfulness (Sarup, 1993, p. 132), the criteria for modern literature, as put forward by Leavis, was "intellectual rigour, subtlety, and wit" (Ward, 1997, p. 27) while being burdened by neither an overabundance of sentiment nor an ornamental writing style. Alternately, a figure supportive of postmodern literature is Ihab Hassan whose own work is described as non-linear and playful with a pastiche text (Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 11). Hassan views postmodernism as a move away from "industrial capitalism and Western categories and values" (Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 11). On the other hand, another critic George Steiner has deplored postmodernism as an attack on the "foundational assumptions and values of Western society" (Best & Kellner, 1991, 12).

Examples of postmodern literature include the writings of Philip Roth, Kurt Vonnegut, Thomas Pynchon, or J.G. Ballard (Ward, 1997; Best & Kellner, 1991). These writers are considered postmodern in the measure that they are "flexible, pluralist and hospitable to the popular" (Ward, 1997, p. 28). Best and Kellner (1991) also suggest that the characteristics such as self-reflexivity, ambiguity, indeterminacy, and paradox, which are commonly associated with postmodernism, are also present in modern literature but found more prominently or exaggerated in the postmodern.

Visual Art

Modernism is the visual arts began in the mid to late 19th century with the introduction of the Impressionists, i.e., Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Pierre Auguste Renoir, Berthe Morisot, and others. The Impressionists signaled a shift from realistic styles of representation to more abstract forms of expression which emphasized a "highly self-conscious art for art sake" (Ward, 1997, p. 33). Important terms related to modernism in the visual arts are experimentation, innovation, individualism, progress, purity, and originality (Ward, 1997; Sarup, 1993).

Minimalism, in the 60s and 70s, which sought to reduce objects to their purist form was believed to represent "the cutting edge of all that is progressive and experimental in culture (Ward, 1997, p. 34). During this time, however, a feeling was beginning to emerge that minimalism had pushed itself to the limit with no where else to go. As a consequence, in the 80s, art turned its attention to "splashy paintings of things" (Ward, 1997, p. 34) and embraced "a pluralist, 'anything goes' attitude" (p. 35). Additional characteristics of postmodern are include: "eclecticism, reflexivity, self-referentiality, quotation, artifice, randomness, anarchy, fragmentation, pastiche and allegory" (Sarup, 1993, p. 132). "One of the main characteristics of postmodernism in art is the multiplication of stylistic norms and methods" (Sarup, 1993, p. 172).

The postmodern artist is distinguished from the modernist artist by being seen as part of the world rather than being separated or apart from it. Before postmodernism, it was thought that an artist could provide a legitimate critique of society and culture only by placing him or herself at a distance. Beyond critiques, it was the task of the modern artist to capture

the culture's timeless values like truth, joy, and solidarity and preserve them for society (Sarup, 1993, p. 141). The postmodern artist, on the other hand, abandons these values in favor of pluralism, pastiche, and irony.

Postmodern visual art has several aims (Ward, 1997). First, it seeks to appeal to a much wider audience than that represented by a small group of cultural elites. It denies that art is isolated from other aspects of social life. Postmodern visual art seeks its place, not as the antithesis of either modern or pop art, but in between these two. Additionally, postmodern visual art challenges the modernist notion that art defines itself rather than being defined through cultural interpretations. An example of postmodern visual art is Andy Warhol's (1930-1987) Campbell soup cans or his silkscreens of Marilyn Monroe.

Social Sciences

Postmodern thought in the social sciences began occurring in the early 80s, subsequent to its introduction in art and literature. Major representatives of postmodern thought include Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida, Jurgen Habermas, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Daniel Bell, and Fredric Jameson (Hollinger, 1994; Dickens & Fontana, 1994). "In my opinion post-structuralists like Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard are postmodernists" (Sarup, 1993, p. 144). These writers, each of whom possess different emphases, can be seen as representatives of 'postmodern theory' to the extent that they criticize and break with traditional theories. The writings of Foucault, Lyotard, and Baudrillard "articulate new perspectives that map the allegedly novel postmodern socio-cultural conditions and develop new modes of theorizing, writing, subjectivity, and politics" (Best & Kellner, p. ix).

The efforts of these writers has been compared to the efforts of individuals like Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, Georg Simmel and Margaret Mead who struggled to find ways of making sense of the dramatic social and cultural changes that were occurring during their lives (Dicken & Fontana, 1994, p. 10). These changes, a consequence of the application of rationalism, were responsible for extraordinary innovations in commerce, industry, and agriculture. The changes occurring today such as increased global commerce, the proliferation of information, and the ubiquity of mass media are "producing a new postmodern social formation" (Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 3). The scale of these changes and innovations are compared to those which occurred following the Middle Ages; a period described as modernity. The social changes happening today are then described by the periodizing term postmodernity.

A precursor of the postmodern critique of modern theory is the post-structural critique of structuralism. Structuralism operated on the assumption that "structures were governed by unconscious codes and rules" (Best & Kellner,1991, p. 18). Consequently, the goal of structuralism was to uncover the mechanisms which determined how a thing functioned. Applied in the social sciences this meant uncovering rules and codes which organized how a society functioned. The structuralists assumed a universal structure lay underneath society that could be discovered and described using categorical terms like true, objective, and foundational (Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 20). Critiques, however, of structuralism were advanced "by Derrida, Foucault, Kristeva, Lyotard, and Barthes which produced an atmosphere of intense theoretical upheaval that helped to form postmodern theory" (Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 20). These poststructuralists attacked the presupposition that scientific

categories like objectivity, rigor, truth, and coherence could be applied in social theory in similar fashion as found in the physical sciences.

Postmodern theory, following poststructuralism, favors discourse theory which views all social phenomena as structured semiotically by codes and rules which then can be analyzed linguistically. Simultaneously, discourse theory supports the notion that "meaning is not simply given, but is socially constructed across a number of institutional sites and practices" (Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 26). Institutional sites and practices can be found in those bodies of knowledge that inform the decisions and actions of a group of people. For example, laws organize and enforce a standard of conduct. Laws exist as a codified body of knowledge and provide the basis upon which decisions of jurisprudence are made. Additionally, the meaning attached to laws are social constructions which is to say that they do not exist independently of that group of people who created them and that group which maintains them. Examples of institutional sites would include academic disciplines, the policies and procedures of an organizational body, ethnic and regional traditions, political and economic systems, or moral codes.

Where modern theory sought to discover universal truths through the application of science and reason, postmodern theory celebrates "multiplicity, plurality, fragmentation, and indeterminacy" (Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 4). Although one might conclude that these characteristics render postmodern theory problematic, Hollinger (1994) suggests that theory remains important for postmodernists. Where modern theory was guided by an effort to reveal universal truths, postmodern theory is "specific to the demands of the day" (Hollinger, 1994, p. 174). Postmodernists, skeptical of modernists claims and conscious of emerging social

formations, have called "for new categories, modes of thought and writing, and values and politics" (Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 30). "The whole point of the postmodernist enterprise is to increase human understanding and possibilities" (Hollinger, 1994, p. 175).

Dissertation Organization

This dissertation is organized around two articles. Chapter 1 provides a general introduction to postmodernism as a descriptor of contemporary culture and its presence across fields of study. The remainder of Chapter 1 is a literature review of family therapy articles that reference postmodernism. Chapter 2, the first article, examines the meaning of the word postmodernism in family therapy literature. Chapter 3, the second article, seeks to address the concern and criticism that postmodernism promotes an attitude of 'anything goes' within therapy in addition to an attempt to make distinctions between postmodernism and the related concepts of social constructionism and social constructivism. Speaking to those issues are Harlene Anderson, Kenneth Gergen, and Michael Mahoney. A general overview of the ideas of these contributors will also be included. Chapter 4 offers concluding remarks and recommendations.

Literature Review

Lowe (1990) suggested that the dominant metaphor in the history of family therapy, the system metaphor, is being called into question. The pervasiveness of the family system metaphor has been so complete that it has become reified in the professional language and is no longer seen as simply a metaphor. Instead, the family system is seen as a phenomena of nature separate and apart from the lives of its individual members. "The family system is a

superordinate entity" (Lowe, 1990, p. 3). Consequently, family therapy has come to mean "performing therapy with or on a family system" (Lowe, 1990, p. 3).

A feature of the utilization of metaphoric language, said Lowe (1990), is that "it selects, organises and emphasises certain features of experience, while ignoring, suppressing, or obscuring others" (p. 2). Relying upon the family system metaphor is no different in the measure that it also selects and suppresses. For instance, information is selected in therapy and then "analyzed at a 'higher' systemic level" (Lowe, 1990, p. 3) rather than simply being taken at face value. Moreover, this metaphor views the family system as the client rather than the people in the room. The family system metaphor also supports a view that the therapist is an expert on systems instead of a participant in a conversation. This metaphor "highlights circularity and reciprocity and obscures inequality and individual responsibility" (Lowe, 1990, p. 3). The family system metaphor also supports "interactional, hierarchical and intergenerational aspects of problems rather then individual, social and cultural aspects" (Lowe, 1990, p. 3).

In addition to overcoming the obfuscation of the above features in a family system metaphor, Lowe (1990) suggested that the turn to language-based metaphors, by Hoffman, Anderson and Goolishian, White and Epston, and others, may also "assist us to re-imagine family therapy" (p. 4). However, before addressing the 're-imagination' of family therapy, Lowe (1990) considered if imagination is even available in our postmodernist age. Imagination in the modernist era was a productive activity that affirmed the power of individuals to discover "a world of original value and truth" (p. 4). In the postmodern age, however, imagination becomes a parody characterized by endless play. Within a postmodern

environment, Lowe questioned how family therapy can remain ethical when there are no epistemological limits. Lowe proposed an answer by drawing upon postmodern cultural studies particularly the work of Richard Kearney. Lowe suggested the adoption of Kearney's notion of a ethical-poetical imagination. Ethics, in this instance, is understood as a personal and social responsibility to others. Consequently, the ethical response in a postmodern context would place "concern for the other ahead of concern for our theories, our models, our teams, our expertise or our reputations" (Lowe, 1990, p. 6). The poetical dimension would encourage creativity as well as tolerate undecidability in an effort to remain open to the 'carnival of possibilities.'

Lowe (1990) also favored metaphors that are based in literary systems, such as discourse and rhetoric, rather than linguistic metaphors which emphasize language or conversation. The difference is that linguistic metaphors point to an abstract entity creating the appearance of a value free, objective activity whereas literary metaphors focus upon the social uses and effects of language or, in other words, the performative aspects of language. The utilization of metaphors based in rhetoric or discourse would encourage therapists to "reflect on our intentions, choices and responsibilities as we exercise our influential rhetorical skills" (Lowe, 1990, p. 8). Lowe (1990) believes that therapy models which lend the impression that clients can evolve or create their own meanings obscure the issue of therapist influence and responsibility.

Parry (1991) proposed the complete adoption of a narrative paradigm for therapy. He suggested that a narrative approach would be particularly useful for life in a postmodern world "that lacks any objective frame of reference" (Parry, 1991, p. 37). Parry began by

describing the agenda of modernism which was to liberate people from repressive superstitions promulgated by cultural authorities of the 19th century bourgeoisie. Unfortunately, this movement of emancipation became what it sought to eliminate when there emerged the idea that the meaning of a person's experience or event could only be discovered by a expert who was able to peer beneath the surface and see the hidden structure. Similarly, the role of the modernist therapist, exemplified by Freud, was to listen to a person's story in an effort to "pronounce on the underlying meaning" (Parry, 1991, p. 38). In other words, to listen to the patient's story, identify the problem lurking beneath the surface, and prescribe the remedy.

Although Parry (1991) said there is little consensus regarding what exactly constitutes postmodernism, he does reference distinctions provided by others. For instance, Parry turned to Hal Foster (1985) who, as an art critic, suggested that there are two varieties. The first type of postmodernism repudiates modernism in favor of pastiche which is a composition that is produced by selecting bits and pieces from various sources. The second type views reality as "a narrative to construct or (better) a concept to produce" (Parry, 1991, p. 38). Additionally, Parry referenced Mark Edmundson (1989), a literary critic, who also defined two types of postmodernism. The first, distinguished as an earlier version, was negative in that it encouraged people "to replace the deity, or some equivalent absolute perspective" (Parry, 1991, p. 38) with the awareness that there is no fixed reference point. The second postmodernism, seen as an emerging positive expression, supports a view of the world that favors transience, uncertainty, and the absence of transcendental values.

Parry recognized that the absence of universal truths may alarm some people who find comfort in such assurances. On the other hand, he suggested that postmodernism will liberate others from the assumptions of repressive ideologies. Ideologies that people may not even have previously been aware of. A phenomenon of the postmodern world, said Parry, is the discovery by marginalized people that there is no longer any compelling reason for them to remain on the edges of society. The notion that these people have been marginalized through the application of pathologizing norms came to Parry via Foucault by way of White and Epston (1989).

Parry's description of a narrative paradigm for family therapy begins with a discussion regarding 'deconstruction' as an inevitable feature of postmodernism in art and literature. The postmodern author, he said, is "freed from the constraints of structural considerations as well as any duty to a subterranean truth" (Parry, 1991, p. 41). Deconstruction, then, as a theory of literary criticism, informs an approach to a text that demands the author's awareness of his or her own assumptions while, at the same time, being free from writing in a way that would have to conform to an existing structure, myth, or truth. It is an approach that is modest and tolerant, and also permits the author to "find, articulate, and maintain" (Parry, 1991, p. 42) his or her own voice in the telling of a story.

A narrative paradigm for family therapy, then, would imply that that there is no longer any need to "explain the meaning of a person's story with regard to a normative structure concerning what makes individuals, families, or systems in general tick" (Parry, 1991, p. 42). Said Parry (1991), "the post-modern therapist can introduce clients to all the things they can do with their story-telling capacities" (p. 42).

The narrative paradigm as described by Parry (1991) views as "central to the therapeutic endeavor" (p. 42) the process of helping people change beliefs about themselves. He said this is accomplished by either "a direct assault on the person's belief system" or by "encouraging a change of behavior" (Parry, 1991, p. 42). He said that postmodernism treats a story as something that is endlessly inventive and therefore possessing a potential to be re-written, revised, or re-invented. The effort behind assisting a person to tell or re-tell his or her experience is informed by the idea that unexamined dominant discourses and hidden assumptions may prevent a person from telling his or her preferred story. Parry suggested that creating opportunities which permit someone to tell a story from his or her unique point of view both validates that person's experience and allows that person to be "in effective charge of [his or] her own life" (Parry, 1991, p. 44). This approach builds upon the notion that the events and traditions in which a person participates over time contribute to a way of seeing the world that can become taken-for-granted. The influence of events and traditions begins at birth and develop into assumptions about the world. These taken-for-granted assumptions, depending upon what they are, can be constraining in the measure they define both the possibilities of a person and the possibilities available to a person. By challenging these assumptions, a narrative family therapist can deconstruct reified beliefs and create space for more possibilities. A repressive ideology is an "instrument that persuades the oppressed and the marginalized that their lives are divinely (or objectively) decreed" (Parry, 1991, p. 50). However, by examining the assumptions present in ideologies people can either "escape from their constraining influences" (Parry, 1991, p. 50) or consciously support them.

Parry (1991) said that constraining beliefs can "best be subverted though [sic] the discovery of events or stories that are inconsistent with the received text of the life story to date" (p. 53). By encouraging imagination and curiosity, people can connect individual stories to larger stories to "make them more meaningful by coming to act as active agents that forward these stories" (Parry, 1991, p. 53). It presumes, however, that people can continually question the assumptions guiding one another's ideas and decisions.

Hoffman (1991) identified a subgroup of family therapists whose work seemed to "qualify as a new approach" (p. 4) by preferring a metaphor of conversation or text over the metaphor of cybernetics. This shift from a cybernetic to a linguistic metaphor is "congenial to the movement known as postmodernism" (Hoffman, 1991, p. 4). For herself personally, Hoffman (1991) said she found the theory of social constructionism useful. She also located this theory "squarely in a postmodern tradition" (Hoffman, 1991, p. 5). Hoffman identified literary critic, Jacques Derrida, and social historian, Michel Foucault, as important contributors to this tradition.

Regarding social constructionism, Hoffman identified five traditional psychological assumptions that social constructionism challenged. First, social constructionism challenges the assumption of objective social research. Specifically, social research is not objective in the sense that the knowledge it produces exists independently of the researcher. Second, social constructionism, per Hoffman (1991), views the self not as "irreducible inner reality" (p. 6), but something that exists in relationship to other people. Third, social constructionism challenged the notion of discrete stages in psychological development. Instead, social constructionism suggests that "developmental trajectories over the lifespan are highly

variable" (Hoffman, 1991, p. 7). Fourth, social constructionism disputes that emotions are "interior states" (Hoffman, 1991, p. 8) that exist within all people in the same way. Rather, emotions are a function of interpersonal communication. Fifth, Hoffman (1991) says that social constructionist thought has lead her to question the existence of "hierarchical layers of structure embedded with human events" (p. 8). For instance, rather that positing the existence of some underlying cause which is responsible for a particular phenomenon, Hoffman wonders if instead there are simply sets of factors which equally contribute to human events.

Hoffman (1991) referred to a postmodern argument that challenges the perpetuation of a normal science which presumes a superior position in the minds of some academics and practitioners particularly in those instances where "a less 'civilized' society than their own" (p. 9) was being studied. Hoffman (1991) suggested that this 'colonial mentality' was highlighted by Foucault in his studies on discourses and can be located in many more disciplines. These discourses, whose assumptions go unchallenged and which shape relationships between people, gradually become seen as 'the way things are' and may, in turn, perpetuate a type of relationship where one person is subjugated by another. Alerted to this possibility, even among therapeutic discourses, and "haunted by the paradoxes of power" (Hoffman, 1991, p. 10), she chose to adopt a reflexive stance. Hoffman's (1991) reflexive stance indicates "a preference for a mutually influenced process between consultant and inquirer as opposed to one that is hierarchical and unidirectional" (p. 12). Hoffman (1991) encouraged a stance in therapy that favored awareness "of the power relations hidden within the assumptions of any social discourse, including 'critical discourse' itself" (p. 16). Hoffman found some similarity with the work of Harry Goolishian and Harlene Anderson in their collaborative approach

which is, she said, postmodern in the measure that the interviewer does not conduct the interview from a privileged position. This notion of postmodernism came from postmodern researcher Eliot Mishler and is based upon a particular interviewing method.

Another version of postmodernism, as articulated by Kenneth Gergen (1991) in The Saturated Self, is criticized by M. Brewster Smith (1994) as promoting an unhealthy notion of self. Smith (1994) suggested that present day feelings of emptiness and despair are "serious threats to selfhood" (p. 407). Smith (1994) claims an awareness of many social features threatening the morale of contemporary society—the cynicism of politics, chaos found in literature, sensationalism of sex and violence in the media, and the uncertainty or "utter rejection of standards" (p. 406). He also claims that the radical relativist stance of postmodernism contributes to these features by rejecting a privileged position for science and the concept of truth as an approachable ideal. Smith (1994) suggested that this type of discourse leaves people "bereft of anchors to stabilize a view of self and world" (p. 408).

A consequence for the field of psychology is the introduction and promotion of antiscientific relativism. Although Smith supports notions of social constructionism, particularly as a corrective to logical positivism in psychology, he is disturbed by those efforts which appear to have as their object the reduction of science to the level of myth or political ideology. Smith (1994) claimed that if the pursuit of science, which he sees as the "human struggle toward truth, goodness, and beauty as meaningful ideals," (p. 409), is abdicated in favor of antiscientific relativism, then the "collapse of traditions and standards in the aesthetic realm" (p. 409) is likely to follow.

Postmodernism, said Smith (1994), is a movement that has come to the social sciences by way of the humanities where it was popular due to its "attunement to the cultural crisis of late modernity" (p. 409). At the same time, he suggested that the antiscientific direction that postmodernism took was a consequence of resentful professors in the humanistic discipline who had to sit "at the far end of the table of academic support, while their colleagues in the sciences ate high on the hog" (Smith, 1994, p. 409).

Larner (1994) said that "a by-product of the post-modernist enterprise in family therapy has been a misunderstanding of Derridean deconstruction" (p. 12). Larner (1994) claimed that White's practice of deconstructing a narrative that oppressed a client with the goal of constructing a preferred story is "a common misconception of deconstructive activity by post-modernists" (p. 12). In fact, said Larner (1994), Derrida position respects the "modernist notions of truth and is not to be confused with post-modernist rhetoric" (p. 12).

Derrida's deconstructive efforts are not designed to subvert a text but rather to examine what the text or discourse "attempts to exclude or suppress" (Larner, 1994, p. 12). Consequently, Larner claimed, any effort to describe Derrida as postmodern *as opposed to* modern misses the thrust of Derrida's effort. In particular, any discussion that relies upon language that utilizes either/or logic or possesses a binary character misses Derrida's efforts to thickly describe phenomena. Larner (1994) said that Derrida views literature as deconstructive in the sense that it does not rely upon a binary metaphor, but rather "describes the 'both/and' complexity of the world in all its ambiguity, uncertainty and paradox" (p. 12).

Therefore, for family therapy theorists to urge a *shift from* modernism *to* postmodernism would be incongruent from a Derridean deconstructionist perspective simply

because it continues either/or logic. To prevent this discontinuity, Larner (1994) suggested a para-modern stance for family therapy. A paramodern stance would include "both the modern and the post-modern" (p. 14). One reason that family therapists have borrowed and mixed metaphors and used contradictory images is not because their approach lacked theoretical rigor, but because the drama of life can rarely be reduced to "the either/or rational choices of theory" (Larner, 1994, p. 14).

The para-modern family therapist, says Larner, would adopt a unique stance toward theory. On the one hand, the para-modern therapist would "respect the truth of a particular therapeutic metaphor" while at the same time acknowledging that one metaphor would be insufficient to capture all the possibilities "that life presents to both our clients and ourselves" (Larner, 1994, p. 15). The para-modern therapist "engages and works out of all metaphors at once" and views these metaphors as co-existing "in the mystery and fabric of life" (Larner, 1994, p. 15).

Larner's (1994) own view of postmodernism is as a challenge to critical-realist ideas of truth and ethics in favor of relativism, skepticism, and nihilism. The application of a postmodern philosophy to therapy would yield uncertainty and a constant revision of self-narratives. Such an approach would contribute to a fragmentation of personal identity and to an absence of moral and existential foundations. In Larner's (1994) view, postmodern family therapists "cannot simply abandon ideas of truth and reality" (p. 14). Rather, "the future challenge for a narrative approach is to find space for a notion of realism, despite the inconsistency" (p. 14). Moreover, for a therapist "to describe what *happens* in [clients] lives as a co-constructed social narrative or story is misguided therapy" (Larner, 1994, p. 13).

Larner also made a distinction between two types of postmodernism. The first, taken from Best and Kellner (1992), suggested that "techno-captialism which (through science, the media, the control of information, computer etc.) penetrates all facets of life (including therapy) is transforming all societies into one global commodity" (Larner, 1994, p. 13). The second type of postmodernism, which he said is characterized by Foucault and Baudrillard, radically encourages a complete break with modernism. Larner (1994) said that the former postmodernism could be "useful in resisting these perils of the present world age" (p. 13). At the same time, he cautioned that there could be a danger in a postmodern therapy if it were to become another theoretical hegemony by supplanting "the old modernist tale" (Larner, 1994, p. 13).

Hare-Mustin (1994) used a postmodern approach to view discourses that may exist in the therapy room. These discourses reflect the prevailing ideologies found in society. Specifically, Hare-Mustin looked at three discourses: the male sex drive discourse, the permissive discourse, and the marriage-between-equals discourse. Hare-Mustin suggested that unless therapists are aware of muted or taken-for-granted discourses, the discourses generated in therapy will simply reflect the interests of dominant discourses.

Hare-Mustin (1994) borrowed from Best and Kellner (1991) who defined a discourse as "the medium that provides the words and ideas for thought and speech, as well as the cultural practices involving related concepts and behaviors" (p. 19). Discourses maintain a certain way of viewing the world through established codes and conventions. Borrowing from Foucault (1980) and Lyotard (1984), Hare-Mustin (1994) said discourse theory approaches knowledge from a postmodernist perspective that views knowledge as multiple, fragmentary,

context-dependent, and local. Postmodernism asserts that "values infuse all knowing" (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 31) and prefers diversity, plurality, and choice.

Although Hare-Mustin (1994) acknowledged that postmodernism embraces relativism, she does not agree that this relativism leads to an absence of values or ethics. Instead, Hare-Mustin believed that acknowledging the absence of an objective truth or vantagepoint from which to declare absolute correctness or rightness, should propel people into conversations about what is good and important in public philosophy. Hare-Mustin's idea of a moral order is one that recognizes that ethical traditions emerge from social interactions and conversations rather than an institutionalized and immutable code that remains unchanged through time and space.

Dominant discourses, which reflect society's prevailing ideologies, are produced through social interaction, in a particular language community, and a socioeconomic context. The cultural narratives with which we are familiar are the product of many discourses intersecting and interacting simultaneously. Dominant discourses, because they are part of a cultural landscape in which people are born into, become "so familiar, they are taken for granted and even recede from view" (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 20). Hare-Mustin (1994) referenced Foucault (1980) when she said that dominant discourses, moreover, do not rise to ascendancy as a consequence of social serendipity. She suggested that it would be naïve to presume that taken-for-granted cultural frameworks did not serve a set of power relations. "Beliefs that come to be regarded as natural do so only because they reflect the most powerful interest groups in society" (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 32). Said Hare-Mustin (1994), "throughout history, dominant groups have asserted their authority over language through control of the

production of knowledge, of the media and publications, and of access to education and to institutions of learning" (p. 21).

Hare-Mustin (1994) claimed that even in family therapy, despite all the talk about marginalized discourses, "most therapists represent the interests and moral standards of the dominant groups in society" (p. 20). Therapists, rather than engaging in social change, are largely agents of social control. Consequently, when a therapist is not aware of the assumptions provided by dominant discourses, they "will fail to do more than render existing norms a little less onerous for those most disadvantaged by them" (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 33). Therapy in this instance simply perpetuates the illusions of truth and maintains the status quo.

To prevent what may be the continuation of hidden assumptions present in dominant discourses, Hare-Mustin counseled two considerations. First, she encouraged that therapists "develop self-reflexivity" (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 33). Specifically, this means attempting to examine with a critical eye the assumptions of the dominant discourse rather than blindly accepting them. Second, she encouraged that therapists accept their own influence and authority as opposed to denying it.

Flaskas (1994) voiced concern that the combination of the postmodernist notion of multiple realities along with the notion of realities as social constructions has contributed to a 'dangerous' idea of reality. Specifically, Flaskas is bothered that there has been a tendency to negate the idea that reality exists apart from our constructions of it. She believed that there is a danger in undermining an "adequate recognition of the power of 'external' realities" (Flaskas, 1994, p. 143).

Flaskas (1994) said that "the very term 'postmodernism' is an oppositional one" (p. 143). Postmodernism is "an umbrella term for a range of very different contemporary ideas and theories, all of which share the commonality of moving beyond, or being counter to, the core commitments of modernism" (Flaskas, 1994, p. 144). Flaskas identified one of modernism's core commitments as the effort to find and describe an observable reality that could then be objectively verified. An effort which would then lead to the discovery of knowledge and universal truths. Flaskas (1994) said that this opposition to an external and knowable reality has been "the central intersection point for systemic therapy" (p. 144). In fact, she said, this opposition to a single objective reality has become the departure point for "an elaboration and justification of a new description of the therapeutic process" (Flaskas, 1994, p. 144) frequently found in approaches utilizing narrative metaphors.

Flaskas (1994) said that in the move away from a single objective reality, proposed by some family therapists, a clear distinction is not being made between two different ideas of reality. One notion, which she attributed to Anderson and Goolishian, says that reality–the nature of the social world–is an inter-subjective construction of meaning of persons experience through language. Hoffman, on the other hand, employs social constructionism in a way that "does not negate the possibility of a world or reality outside our constructions of it, but rather focuses on the process by which we come to understand and know the world" (Flaskas, 1994, p. 145). Hoffman, said Flaskas, uses social constructionism to describe how people come to know and experience the world where Anderson and Goolishian describe the nature of the social world.

Flaskas (1994) made the point that Anderson and Goolishian use social constructionist theory in a different way than does Hoffman in an effort to address the "postmodern dilemma about reality" (p. 145). Moreover, this different way "is not especially recognised in the literature" (Flaskas, 1994, p. 145). In the end, Flaskas favored an idea of reality that acknowledges the possibilities and restrictions of a physical, social and emotional world, and which views language both as a social construction and as that which socially constructs the world. She favored the idea that people simultaneously construct realities and are constructed by realities. These social constructions both constrain what is possible and create new possibilities.

Pocock (1995) suggested that it was not very useful to insist upon a division of positions in family therapy as either modern or postmodern. Instead, he encouraged combining the two in a manner where one would restrain the other thereby preventing excesses from occurring in either direction. Specifically, Pocock (1995) said that "the postmodern critique has the potential to restrain modern theory from hardening" (p. 160) into ideologies. It was Pocock's (1995) thought that a therapist who can be attentive to both modern and postmodern ideas simultaneously has the opportunity to create a "better story" (p. 149). Two modernist features of the 'better story' are that it looks past surface appearances and also acknowledges the constraints that external realities impose upon a story's possibilities. From a postmodern perspective, a better story makes no claims to either absolute truths or unassailable objective realities. Pocock's (1995) notion of postmodernism, which is borrowed from Lowe (1991) is a critique of the assumption of modernism that knowledge is something separate and apart from the knower and is able to be presented objectively to the knower.

Where knowledge derives from social communication, reality is a function of consensus. Pocock links postmodernism with social constructionism by referencing Hoffman (1990) but does not explicitly say how the two are linked except to say that narrative therapists are influenced by writers like Foucault, Derrida, and Lyotard. Pocock suggested that narrative therapists are postmodern because they have borrowed some ideas from these writers. Furthermore, since concerns about the influence of social constructions are shared by both narrative therapists and postmodern writers, Pocock concluded social constructionism shares postmodern concerns.

For Pocock (1995) the narrative therapist is "concerned with the wider social construction of attitudes and attributes, linking the individual not just to the family but to powerful cultural discourses which constantly define how people should behave and think" (p. 156). As a consequence, narrative therapists are attentive to the powerful ways language can function in constructing social realities.

Pocock (1995) said that what makes a better story, specifically referring to a story that evolves between the therapist and family, is one that is "more congruent, object-adequate, encompassing, holding, just, shared, emotional, conscious, provisional, and hopeful" (p. 161). A better story, which can only be known through family feedback, is one that "eventually proved useful" to the family (p. 161). It is also a story that leads family members to ways of living which they prefer. At the same time, however, Pocock points out that the better story for the family may not correspond to the better story vis-à-vis culture and society. He illustrated his point by describing a family "in which the sexual abuse of a child comes to be seen as the child's fault" (p. 162). He said that although that story may be a good fit for all

members in the family, other parameters apart from family usefulness and good fit must be considered.

Frosh (1995) said that most of the approaches in family therapy that claim to be postmodern are not postmodern at all but "language-based therapeutic procedures" (p. 175). Frosh suggested that family therapy has adopted some fashionable aspects of postmodernism that appear to be "amenable to therapeutic applications," (Frosh, 1995, p. 175), but ignore postmodernism's contradictory or challenging elements.

Frosh said that Lynn Hoffman's claims to postmodern status rests upon her emphasis on an emancipatory therapeutic dialogue which endeavors to liberate clients from oppressive stories. Similarly, Alan Parry's (1991) work as a postmodernist, said Frosh, is based upon the notion that by participating in the exploration of alternative client stories therapist can enable "clients to shake off constraining beliefs so that they can live their stories henceforth as they choose" (as cited in Frosh, 1995, p. 176). Both these emphases, said Frosh (1995), point to these therapist's recognition of the "constructive possibilities of language" (p. 177).

However, Frosh claimed that there is nothing uniquely postmodern about viewing language as possessing constructive possibilities. Frosh's (1995) understanding of postmodernism, which is based upon the work of Slavoj Zizek, describes the "insufficiency of language as a means of embracing experience" (p. 178). Consequently, therapeutic approaches which rely upon language to sufficiently describe a client's experience would be "pre-postmodern." Said Frosh, "the modernist approach is as much about language as is the postmodernist; the difference is that modernism espouses the possibility of making sense of experience by achieving at least some rational distance" (p. 184).

Frosh (1995) said, "those therapists calling themselves 'postmodern' have focused mainly on the constitutive or performative nature of language—how language creates its speakers, positioning people as subjects in relation to one another, and to something over and above themselves" (p. 185). Postmodern therapists, on the other hand, engage in conversation that is full of contradiction, disparity, and sometimes conflict.

Postmodern therapists, having abandoned the search for real meaning or truth, operate upon the notion that the opportunity to 'story' or 'restory' an experience can construct an alternative story that recognizes the 'polyvocality' of experience in a way that precludes the modern tendency toward marginalization. Frosh (1995) asked, does a "language-centred approach to therapy really deserve the title 'postmodernist?'" (p. 186). If, in postmodernism, positions are all provisional and no perspective or narrative can gain ascendancy over another, how is it possible for a postmodern therapist to encourage or participate in a conversation that will ultimately be more meaningful to a client? Said Frosh (1995), "the promises of a better narrative, a more constructive way of being, or a fuller and more developed self are not available under postmodern conditions" (p. 187).

"I am suggesting that so-called 'postmodernist therapies' are not really postmodern at all, but are, rather, modernist" (Frosh, 1995, p. 189). Frosh further suggested that postmodern therapists identify themselves so because "of their focus on language, often from within a social constructionist framework, and their concern to reduce or at least make obvious the asymmetries or power present in traditional therapeutic interactions" (pp. 188-189), but adds that language and egalitarianism are also aspects of modernism.

Frosh (1995) raised the question of the appropriateness of postmodern's application in therapy particularly when postmodern celebrates "the arbitrariness of who we are and how we came to be" (p. 188), and "irrationality " (p. 189) as a crucial element of experience. In the end, Frosh (1995) suggested that therapy "has little to do, essentially, with postmodernism—and that that is just as it should be" (p. 178).

Paré (1996) proposed that family therapy incorporate culture as an alternative metaphor of viewing the family. He suggested that considering family as culture is congruent "with postmodern, social constructionist thinking" (Paré, 1996, p. 29) and possesses significant utility for practical clinical application. Paré (1996) does not claim that a cultural metaphor will make therapy any less simple, but suggested that it will embrace systemic principles and cultural dynamics that recognize "the breadth of our stories as families and individuals" (p. 39). Paré asserted that by expanding the metaphors that inform therapy, therapists may enhance their appreciation of the issues by being able to view them from more than one point of reference.

Paré (1996), referencing Foucault and Gergen, said that awarenesses created by postmodernism regarding how knowledge and power privilege some voices or stories has contributed to an awareness that a systems metaphor does not adequately address the notion of power as a social construct. Consequently, in the area of social and cultural contexts, the systems view is constrained in its "metaphorical reach" (Paré, 1996, p. 27). Said Paré (1996), "the traditional metaphor of the family as a system (and the web of metaphors that surround it) fails to encompass the current emphasis on the contextual and constitutive aspects of knowledge" (p. 25).

Paré (1996) suggested that family therapy informed by a postmodern perspective "demands an expanded range of metaphors for the family and the work of therapy" (p. 21). A postmodern approach to family therapy would emphasize a client's creative "ability to reconstrue their worlds in accordance with their values and aspirations" (Paré, 1996, p. 22). Paré (1996) then described the meanings of metaphor, story, and theory from a postmodern view. Referencing Lakehoff and Johnson (1980) Paré (1996) described a metaphor as a device that "allows us to understand one domain of experience in terms of another" (Paré, 1996, p. 23). A metaphor, rather than being a direct reflection of reality, is a "construction of experience" (p. 23). The definition of a story, borrowing from Polkinghorne (1988) and Mitchell (1981) is "the temporal organization and meaning dimensions of experience" (Paré, 1996, p. 23) Paré's usage of story referred to a view of people as interpretive beings who are contextually situated and yet active in co-constructing a world through language. Turning to Bruner (1990) and Parry (1991), Paré (1996) defined a narrative as an organizational framework which becomes "the means by which we construct our views of ourselves and our lives" (p. 23). A theory, referencing Gergen (1991) was a social construction that is metaphorical in nature and reflects a historical and cultural origin.

Pointing to Sarbin (1986), Paré said that many theoretical models found in western science utilize mechanistic root metaphors. Furthermore, these metaphors, having been relied upon over many years to re-present reality have become reified. In other words, the metaphor has come to be seen as the reality rather than as a useful description of a shared experience or event. Paré said that in the same way a metaphor becomes reified, so do theories. Rather than being seen as a useful *description*, a reified theory *constitutes* social structures and processes.

Events and circumstances are shaped in a way to fit with the theory. Incidences of incongruity that are outside what is predicted by the theory remain unexplained or dismissed.

Paré (1996) said that there is "a growing body of family therapy literature" (p. 28) that view the family as a culture and points to Waters (1994) and White (1990) as contributors. Paré (1996) suggested that viewing the family through a cultural metaphor resonates with the postmodern tenets of a "nonobjectivist, nonfoundationalist, perspectival orientation" (p. 26). Consequently, he argues that an approach to family therapy that incorporates cultural metaphors will address the same concerns found in the postmodern debate by being attentive to "issues of hierarchy and power, gender and other cultural specifications, responsibility and accountability" (Paré, 1996, p. 38).

Flemons, Green, and Rambo (1996) highlighted the theoretical dilemma faced by postmodernist clinicians who are expected to supervise and evaluate students in a family therapy doctoral program. Specifically, they asked, how can a supervisor "from a social constructionist perspective, [where there is] no objective place to stand and judge another therapist's work as either good or bad," dispatch his or her obligation of evaluating students toward determining whether or not they are competent to receive a graduate diploma? These authors locate their academic and clinical work in a 'postmodern world' which is suggested to be a place where "it is no longer possible to bolster an ethical stance by appealing to some outside or universal standard" (Flemons, et al., 1996, p. 45).

Postmodernism as reflected in therapy is understood by these authors as "the loss of certainty, the loss of the idea that there can be one privileged (correct) understanding of problem situations" (Flemons et al., 1996, p. 44). Furthermore, these authors, referencing

Goolishian and Anderson (1992), suggest that a therapy informed by a postmodern perspective is initiated from "a position of 'not-knowing,' with the realization that he or she must learn from the expertise of the client" (Flemons, et al., 1996, p. 44). The ideas of social constructionist theorists, said Flemons, Green, and Rambo (1996), are located in the postmodern tradition which "views all knowledge and ideas as evolving through language and taking shape in the realm of the 'common world' or 'common dance'" (p. 44).

Having discussed notions related to postmodernism, these authors then described how they developed, using a postmodern approach, a schema composed of 32 skills to use as an evaluative tool. The postmodern approach involved "the recursive interaction between [the authors] shared values, the supervisors' observations, and the students' performances with clients" (Flemons et al., 1996, p. 48).

These authors suggested that this schema of evaluation considers the contextual relationships that they, as faculty members, have with their students, the university, the public, and the community of family therapists. These relationships circumscribe the range of what the authors "are able and willing to do" (Flemons et al., 1996, p. 46). This all seems to suggest that, at the level of practical doctoral supervision, they can be evaluative of students, hold them accountable to the articulated skills, and as long as "both supervisor and supervisee are able to learn from each other," (Flemons, et al., 1996, p. 46). At an epistemological level, it means that they view the world not possessing any "outside or universal standards' (Flemons et al., 1996, p. 45) to which they can appeal.

Kogan and Gale (1997) examined how a postmodern therapist, Michael White, manages talk in a therapy session. The purpose of their study was to investigate, using

conversational analysis, how an actual session is conducted based upon the premises of postmodernism. Viewing a couples therapy session as a text, Kogan and Gale (1997) considered "how language and discourse *functioned* to create possibilities for meaning and interaction" (p. 102).

Kogan and Gale (1997) referenced Sarup's (1993) who suggested that postmodernism vis-à-vis Foucault, Derrida, and Lyotard critiques modernity by assuming an "anti-objectivist, anti-foundationist stance with regard to what is knowable in the world" (p. 102). With regard to reality, Kogan and Gale (1997) referenced Hoffman (1990), Anderson and Goolishian (1988), and Gergen (1985), who describe postmodern reality as socially constructed, context-dependent, constituted in and mediated through language, and possessed of multiple realities. Turning to Gergen (1985), Kogan and Gale said that the postmodern self is not a fixed 'thing,' but emerges from social discourse. Individual identity is considered in light of the contexts and conversations that contribute to a person's sense of self. Consequently, a person's identity is a function of "social interaction the emerges from and reproduces discourse" (Kogan & Gale, 1997, p. 103). Discourse, said Kogan and Gale (1997), "refers to any related system of thoughts or ideas as manifested in language, be it written or oral, and the associated social practices that accompany that system of meanings" (p. 102). Thus, discourses are seen as "producing systems of behaviors and conditions and delimits what behavior may occur, they have quite concrete effects" (Kogan & Gale, 1997, p. 103). Also, Kogan and Gale acknowledged that these social discourses have real consequences that can not be made to disappear by simply telling one's self a different story.

Kogan and Gale referenced Shumway (1989) who said postmodern thinkers situate experiences and events in cultural and historical contexts which, in turn, has the effect of unmasking those social forces or ideas that are not commonly scrutinized and, as a result, contribute to a 'way of seeing things' that maintains the social and cultural status quo. For a definition of the postmodern critique, Kogan and Gale referred to Sarup (as cited in Kogan & Gale, 1997), who said that it rejects "the idea that a singular meaning or essence can be derived from any phenomenon" (p. 104).

A textual analysis identified five practices that the therapist used to decenter the local evolving narrative between participants and this narrative embeddedness in larger cultural discourses. The five conversational practices are: matching/self-disclosure, reciprocal editing, turn management to de-objectify, expansion questions, and reversals. These practices are distinguished from techniques which imply a centered therapist and refer, instead, to an intervention that attempts to recognize the therapist as a participant who is conscious of the agendas of both the local and cultural contexts.

Weingarten (1998) discussed five concepts that she routinely uses in therapy that she said are consistent with a postmodern narrative practice. These are discourse, externalizing the internalized discourse, exceptions, power as the means to produce a consensus, and characteristics of narrative. In a postmodern narrative therapy, "it is the client whose knowledges must be brought forward, illuminated, and amplified" (Weingarten, 1998, p. 4). "The postmodern narrative therapist is no longer the expert knowing how couples and families can—should—solve their problems" (Weingarten, 1998, p. 4). Rather, the therapist is "dedicated to listening as carefully as possible to the stories people tell about their lives"

(Weingarten, 1998, p. 4). This is accomplished in a non-hierarchical manner with attention paid to ways the therapist can "honor clients' abilities to locate fresh directions and solutions out of the own experience" (Weingarten, 1998, p. 4). Weingarten (1998) referenced White (1990) when she claimed that the postmodern narrative therapist believes it is through the telling and re-telling of a problematic story, which is listened to and responded to thoughtfully, that alternatives to the troubled story will emerge. Weingarten (1998) cited Freedman and Combs (1996), Lax (1992), and Parry and Doan (1994), when she asserted, "For a postmodern narrative therapist, there are no 'true' stories, no fixed 'truths,' no master narratives" (p. 4).

Postmodern narrative therapists are interested in conversations that promote many possibilities for a client to move forward. These therapists seek to co-construct preferred narratives that fit the person's lived experience. One of Weingarten's (1998) task "is to help people make sense of their lives" (p. 5). By seeing herself as an active participant, Weingarten (1998) suggested that this "creates an opportunity and an imperative for right action and for ethical response" (p. 5).

To define her concept of discourse, Weingarten (1998) turned to a definition given by social historian Joan Scott (1990) who said it "is a 'historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs' that are embedded in institutions, social relationships, and texts" (p. 7). The lives of clients who come to therapy are "inextricably connected" (Weingarten, 1998, p. 7) and influenced by many social and cultural discourses whether they are aware of it or not.

Weingarten (1998) pointed to Michael White and David Epston as the developers of this practice of externalizing internalized discourses. Externalizing internalized discourse is a therapeutic conversational practice that seeks to reify a client's problem with the goal of giving it an identity that is separate from the identity of the person who is experiencing the problem. For the notion of exceptions, Weingarten (1998) again referred to White and Epston, who describe it as "alternative stories to the ones currently dominant in a person's life" (p. 11).

Power as a means of producing consensus is a notion taken from Steven Lukes, a British political scientist. Weingarten said that it refers to the power inherent in a discourse to produce a consensus at the risk of "experiencing another person as accepting and elaborating what [he or] she has to say without challenging its basic integrity" (Weingarten, 1998, p. 12-13). Characteristics of narrative refers to a schema that Weingarten uses to analyze narratives. Her schema includes the narrative features of narrative coherence, closure, and interdependence.

While Minuchin (1998) acknowledged that postmodernist ideas are prevalent in family therapy literature, he is critical of their effects. Specifically, Minuchin (1998) was concerned about the effects of "postmodern ideas on the ways families are approached and responded to in narrative family therapy" (p. 397). Toward examining this question, Minuchin then presented three definitions of social constructionism by Gergen (1994), Farber and Sherry (1997), and Foucault (cited in Farber and Sherry, 1997). Gergen (cited in Minuchin, 1998) said social constructionism "is a revolution that . . . replaces the dualist epistemology of a knowing mind confronting a material world with a social epistemology. The locus of

knowledge is no longer taken to be the individual mind, but rather patterns of social relatedness" (p. 397). Farber and Sherry (cited in Minuchin, 1998) state that social constructionism "is both simple and astonishingly powerful. Stated baldly, the thesis is that reality is socially constructed by the powerful in order to perpetuate their own hegemony" (p. 397). Third, Minuchin (1998) suggested that the following quote from Foucault which was taken from Farber and Sherry described social constructionism—"What counts an objective knowledge is a power relation, one category of people benefiting at the expense of another category of people" (p. 397). Minuchin (1998) defined postmodernism as a political stance which initially sought to challenge the "exploitive power of capitalist and imperialist forces in society" (p. 398) by organizing the oppressed. Now, however, postmodernism "has become almost wholly ideological" (Minuchin, 1998, p. 398).

Minuchin (1998) suggested that some family therapists "were taking a political stance in their work on the basis of social constructionism" (p. 398). He raised the question regarding the "relationship of social constructionism to the intensely pragmatic practice of family therapy" (Minuchin, 1998, p. 398). Minuchin is concerned about the appropriateness of applying a political ideology at an individual therapeutic level. Furthermore, Minuchin is concerned that family therapists are applying an incorrect interpretation of social constructionism. For instance, why would a narrative therapist would focus upon the individual if social constructionism is concerned with the relational? Minuchin (1998) suggested that Gergen and Bruner would "jump over the family as an intermediate construct" and prefer to deal with people in the larger culture. In this light, social constructionism offers nothing to the therapist in terms of helping to understand how a family functions.

Minuchin (1998) completed his critique of narrative therapy by listing unique perspectives and practices that it brings to the family therapy field as well as "serious losses" (p. 403). He suggested that narrative therapy is a move away from systemic principles in favor of emphases on culture and context. It is a move, he believes, that departs from the roots of family therapy and postmodern theory.

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CHAPTER 2. COMMON IDEAS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF 'POSTMODERNISM' FOUND IN FAMILY THERAPY LITERATURE

A paper to be submitted to *Family Process*
Jeff Crane

ABSTRACT

The introduction of postmodern ideas and characteristics within the theory and praxis of family therapy has also been accompanied by confusion. Thirty-one articles from seven journals related to family therapy were examined to determine how 'postmodernism' is understood within this domain. This research found six general categories within which comments regarding the postmodern ideas are expressed. Within the core category, twenty-six distinct ideas and/or characteristics were identified.

Within the field of family therapy, features of postmodernism can be found in many approaches to therapy (Andersen, 1992; Anderson, 1997; Anderson & Goolishian, 1992; de Shazer, 1991; White and Epston, 1990; Hoffman, 1991; Zimmerman and Dickerson, 1994; Parry and Doan, 1994; Freedman and Combs, 1996; Weingarten, 1998). More specifically, academics and clinicians are employing concepts of postmodernism in supervision (Andersen, 1992; Flemons, Green, and Rambo, 1996; Caldwell, Becvar, Bertolino, and Diamond, 1997; Gardner, Bobele, and Biever, 1997; Hardy, 1993), in analysis (Caldwell, et al., 1997; Smith, 1998), in social critiques (Hare-Mustin, 1994; Paré, 1996), in theoretical applications (Parry, 1991; Hoffman, 1991; Flaskas, 1994; Frosh, 1995), as the object of study (Kogan and Gale, 1997), and in ethics, (Lowe, 1990; Hoyt, 1996). Unfortunately, despite postmodernism's prevalence in the literature, there is little agreement with regard to its meaning. For instance,

said Best and Kellner (1991), "We shall see, there is no unified postmodern theory, or even a coherent set of positions" (p. 2). On the other hand, Gergen (1991) claimed, "Still, there seems to be a corpus of coherently related ideas and images surrounding the use of the term [postmodern]" (p. xi). Not surprisingly then, more than one academician has suggested that the term postmodern resists easy definition (Flynn, 1994; Doherty, 1991; Pocock, 1995; Miller & de Shazer, 1998). "The term is at once fashionable and elusive" (Sarup, 1988, p. 129).

Yet despite the uncertainty that surrounds postmodernism and its features, theorists and therapists have not retreated from its study and application. For instance, there are postmodern views on knowledge (Pocock, 1995; Paré, 1996; Weingarten, 1998), on reality (Parry, 1991; Flaskas, 1994; Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Kogan & Gale, 1997), on discourses (Lowe, 1990; Hoffman, 1991; Larner, 1994), and on power (Hare-Mustin, 1994; Hoffman, 1991; Paré, 1996). There are also references to a 'postmodern world' (Parry & Doan, 1994; Flemons, et al., 1996), and a 'postmodern tradition' (Becvar & Becvar, 1993; Doherty, 1991).

Although one might think that increased attention to and the study of an object would yield greater clarity, consensus surrounding the understanding of postmodernism and its features is proceeding very slowly. "One is struck by the diversities between theories often lumped together as 'postmodern' and the plurality—often conflictual—of postmodern positions" (Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 2). As an example, consider Frosh (1995) who suggested that those therapists who call themselves postmodernist are really modernists. Frosh's version of postmodernism celebrates movement toward irrationality, fragmentation, and arbitrariness.

Consequently, any approach that promises a more meaningful way of being for a client would not reflect postmodernism, but modernism. Parry (1991) said postmodernism repudiates underlying structures or hidden truths. However three years later, Parry and Doan (1994) talked about "uncovering the hidden text" (p. 39) in an effort to free a person from its constraining effects. Kenneth Gergen (personal communication, 1998) described postmodernism as a negative dialectic that is essentially *deconstructive* versus social constructionism which is more positive and *constructive*. This understanding would suggest that the term social constructionism, rather than postmodernism, would be a more congruent descriptor of a therapeutic activity that seeks to co-construct meaning.

Flaskas (1994) suggested that postmodernism is "an umbrella term for a range of very different contemporary ideas and theories, all of which share the commonality of *moving beyond*, or *being counter to*, [italics added] the core commitment of modernism" (p. 144). Larner (1994), on the other hand, described a type of postmodernism that seeks to *reconstruct* modernism. Frosh (1995) said postmodernism encourages movement toward the irrational, provisional, and arbitrary, yet Pocock (1995) said postmodernism can be used with modernism to create a 'better story' that is, among other things, more congruent. Paré (1996) said that among the issues central to the postmodern debate are "responsibility and accountability" (p. 38). On the other hand, Duncan and Solovey (as cited in Anderson, et al., 1995) advocate an "'anything goes' posture" (p. 496). Flemons et al. (1996) acknowledged that, for the postmodern clinical supervisor, there is no objective place to stand and judge another therapist's work as either good or bad. And yet in the same article, these authors

utilized postmodern concepts to develop a schema of thirty-two skills with which to evaluate students.

As these examples illustrate, postmodernism within family therapy literature is understood in ways that are often at odds with other published understandings. The purpose of this paper is to look for common understandings of postmodernism in the professional literature and family therapy literature in particular. By identifying those understandings and features of postmodernism in the literature, a space may be opened for consensus to develop with regard to its meaning. An assumption of the researcher is that a portion of the concern and controversy in the literature is the consequence of a lack of consensus with regard to the meaning of the term postmodernism and its derivatives. In the instance where the term is used without being followed by an adequate definition, readers may bring understandings of postmodernism that are informed by its meaning in other fields of study, i.e., architecture, literature, or the visual arts, which may not be congruent the term's usage within the family therapy domain. This, in turn, may be contributing to the present confusion and conflict. The inconsistencies present in the literature justify this effort. Identifying common categories and concepts may contribute to an effort of building a consensus among theorists and therapists with regard to the meaning of postmodernism and also yield an original contribution to the field of therapy.

Researcher's Bias

The assumption of this researcher is that the language and concepts found in postmodern thought provide a compelling description of certain social phenomena, i.e., the power of cultural discourses to marginalize. At the same time, however, the interviewer

believes that social discourses are constitutive to society and culture. Consequently, the interviewer sees a potential danger in the practical application of versions of postmodern theory that would seem to encourage the subversion of society or social discourses without any commitment to another aesthetic.

It is further a presumption of this inquiry that a field of study benefits from efforts to introduce clarity with regard to words and concepts that are routinely found in the professional literature. It is also an assumption of the researcher that sustained ambiguity, like that employed by deconstructionists could deconstruct theories and ideas that inform the practice of therapy without offering any replacement.

Research Questions

This inquiry will attempt to answer the following questions. Is there a corpus of related ideas that surround the use of the term 'postmodernism' within the domain of family therapy? What are the common characteristics of 'postmodernism' present in family therapy literature?

Method

Toward examining the issue of how postmodernism is understood in family therapy literature, this research project will rely upon qualitative methodology. Qualitative methods consist of three kinds of data collection: (1) in-depth, open-ended interviews; (2) direct observation; and (3) written documents (Patton, 1990). More specifically, this research will use the constant comparative method as the means for analyzing the data. Qualitative research, rather than beginning with theoretical premises that predict a pattern of results,

starts with the data in an effort to develop theoretical categories, concepts, and propositions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Data collection

Beyond field observations and interviewing, sources of data for qualitative analyses include "published documents of all kinds and private documents like letters and diaries" (Strauss, 1987, p. 26) or as named by Lincoln and Guba (1985), records and documents. A record has the "purpose of attesting to an event or providing an accounting" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 277). A document is "any written or recorded material other than a record that was not prepared specifically in response to a request from the inquirer" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 277).

The source material relied upon for examining how the term postmodernism was understood in family therapy literature are quotes from thirty-one articles (see Table 1) taken from the following journals: *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, Family Process, Journal of Family Therapy, Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy, Contemporary Family Therapy - An International Journal, Contemporary Family Therapy, and Journal of Strategic and Systemic Therapies.*

A word search was conducted on the PsychLit data base for any article in which the word postmodern or postmodernism or postmodernist appeared as a key word. These articles were then searched for any direct reference to the word 'postmodern' or 'postmodernism' or 'postmodernist'. The sentence in which one of these words appeared was then quoted and assigned a reference code. Where reference to one of the words was made through the use of a pronoun, i.e., 'it,' the word appears in brackets. Where the meaning of the sentence

Table 1. Articles referencing postmodernism

Code	Article
A	Lowe, R. (1990). Re-imagining family therapy: Choosing the metaphors we live by. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy, 11*, 1-9.
B	Real, T. (1990). The therapeutic use of self in constructionist/systemic therapy. *Family Process, 29*, 255-272.
C	Hoffman, L. (1991). A reflexive stance for family therapy. *Journal of Strategic and Systemic Therapies, 10*, 4-17.
D	Parry, A. (1991). A universe of stories. *Family Process, 30*, 37-54.
E	Madigan, S. P. (1992). The application of Michel Foucault's philosophy in the problem externalizing discourse of Michael White. *Journal of Family Therapy, 14*, 265-279.
F	Hardy, K. (1993). Live supervision in the postmodern era of family therapy: Issues, reflections, and questions. *Contemporary Family Therapy: An International Journal, 15*, 9-20.
G	Zimmerman, J. L., & Dickerson, V.C. (1993). Separating couples from restraining patterns and the relationship discourse that supports them. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 19*, 403-413.
H	Fish, V. (1993). Poststructuralism in family therapy: Interrogating the narrative/conversational mode. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 19*, 221-232.
I	Flaskas, C. (1994). Postmodernism, constructionism and the idea of reality: A contribution to the 'ism' discussion. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy, 16, 143-146.
J	Zimmerman, J. L., & Dickerson, V. C. (1994). Using a narrative metaphor: Implications for theory and clinical practice. *Family Process, 33*, 269-280.
K	Hare-Mustin, R. T. (1994). Discourse in the mirrored room: A postmodern analysis of therapy. *Family Process, 33*, 19-35.
L	Larner, G. (1994). Para-modern family therapy: Deconstructing post-modernism. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy, 15*, 11-16.
M	Larner, G. (1995). The real as illusion: Deconstructing power in family therapy. *Journal of Family Therapy, 17*, 191-217.
N	Pocock, D. (1995). Searching for a better story: Harnessing modern and postmodern positions in family therapy. *Journal of Family Therapy, 17*, 149-173.
O	Frosh, S. (1995). Postmodernism versus psychotherapy. *Journal of Family Therapy, 17*, 175-190.
P	Caldwell, K., Becvar, D. S., Bertolino, R., & Diamond, D. (1997). A postmodern analysis of a course on clinical supervision. *Contemporary Family Therapy, 19*, 269-287.

Table 1. (continued)

Code	Article
Q	Hart, B. (1995). Re-authoring the stories we work by situating the narrative approach in the presence of the family of therapists. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy, 16*, 181-189.
R	Spellman, D., & Harper, D. J. (1996). Failure, mistakes, regret and other subjugated stories in family therapy. *Journal of Family Therapy, 18*, 205-214.
S	Paré, D. A. (1996). Culture and meaning: Expanding the metaphorical repertoire of family therapy. *Family Process, 35*, 21-42.
T	Kogan, S. M., & Gale, J. E. (1997). Decentering therapy: Textual analysis of a narrative therapy session. *Family Process, 36*, 101-126.
U	Dare, C. (1998). Psychoanalysis and family systems revisited: the old, old story? *Journal of Family Therapy, 20*, 165-176.
V	Smith, G. L. (1998). The present state and future of symbolic-experiential family therapy: A post-modern analysis. *Contemporary Family Therapy, 20*, 147-161.
W	Weingarten, K. (1998). The small and the ordinary: The daily practice of a postmodern narrative therapy. *Family Process, 37*, 3-15.
X	Miller, G., & de Shazer, S. (1998). Have you heard the latest rumor about ...? Solution-Focused therapy as a rumor. *Family Process, 37*, 363-377.
Y	Doan, R. E. (1998). The King is dead; long live the King: Narrative therapy and practicing what we preach. *Family Process, 37*, 379-385.
Z	Minuchen, S. (1998). Where is the family in narrative family therapy? *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 24*, 397-403.
AA	Combs, G., & Freedman, J. (1998). Tellings and retellings. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 24*, 405-408.
AB	Tomm, K. (1998). A question of perspective. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 24*, 409-413.
AC	Sluzki. C. E. (1998). In search of the lost family: A footnote to Minuchen's essay. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 24*, 415-417.
AD	Anderson, H. (1999). Reimagining family therapy: Reflections on Minuchen's invisible family. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 25*, 1-8.
AE	Minuchen, S. (1999). Retelling, reimagining, and re-searching: A continuing conversation. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 25*, 9-14.

containing the word could be more fully understood by reading the prior or subsequent sentence, that sentence was included in the quote. In addition to these articles, other articles not currently indexed in the PsychLit data base were also included based upon content relevant to this inquiry, i.e., references to postmodernism.

Analysis of data

Rigorous qualitative research requires an adequate description of the process used by the researcher in the gathering and analysis of the data. The process for this inquiry was based upon the constant comparative method. Glaser and Strauss (1967) identified four stages for data analysis: 1) comparing incidents applicable to each category, 2) integrating categories and their properties, 3) delimiting the theory, and 4) writing the theory.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggested that the analysis starts by coding each incident or unit into as many categories of analysis as possible while comparing it with the previous incidents or units in the same group as well as different categories. An incident or unit may be either a sentence or a paragraph found within observational notes, responses to interviews, or other pertinent documents or records (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 346). Of note is that the set of categories that emerge "cannot be described as *the* set; all that can be reasonably be required of the analyst is that he or she produce *a* set that provides a 'reasonable' construction of the data [all italics in the original]" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 347).

The second stage consists of integrating categories and their properties. As the data analysis process continues, the "units change from comparison of incident with incident to comparison of incident with properties of the category that resulted from initial comparisons of incidents" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 108). Lincoln and Guba (1985) described this second

step as examining the incidents in a way that tests the properties of the categories. Through the process of "working back and forth" the researcher may identify properties within a category that merit its further subdivision, i.e., subcategories.

The third stage of the constant comparative method described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) is delimiting the theory. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested substituting the word 'theory' with the word 'construction' in order to remain faithful to their stance of working within a naturalistic paradigm. Delimiting occurs as more and more data is processed and categorical modifications become fewer. As a consequence of categories being reduced, parsimony occurs and categories move toward saturation.

The fourth stage of writing the theory (construction) occurs when the researcher has finished coding the incidents and has identified categories that will become the major themes of the theory (construction) for subsequent presentations or publications.

Although the process of data analysis is identical to the stages described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) for generating grounded theory, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that the constant comparative method can be utilized to analyze data without a need to generate a theory. Lincoln and Guba (1985) point out "that Glaser and Strauss (1967) are describing, in the constant comparative method, a means for deriving (grounded) theory, not simply a means for processing data" (p. 339). Lincoln and Guba (1985) operating from a naturalistic paradigm use the steps outlined by Glaser and Strauss's constant comparative method "not particularly in theory development" (p. 340) but towards "their data processing aspects" (p. 340).

Triangulation

Data was collected from multiple contributors to discussions of postmodernism and therapeutic theory and practice as found among family therapy journals. This form of data triangulation allows researchers to look for consistency of data across sources (Guba, 1981).

Internal audit

The data collection and analysis procedure was reviewed by an individual experienced in qualitative research to assure a rigorous data collection procedure.

Procedure

The data analysis followed established qualitative research procedures to identify categories and concepts found in the literature. The following steps were used to identify major categories and concepts concerning the use of the word postmodernism in the family therapy literature.

1. Each article was read and re-read for occasions where the author specifically used the word 'postmodern' or 'postmodernism' or 'postmodernist.' The sentence containing the term was then copied verbatim, referenced by author, and given a reference number.
2. Once the quotes were collected, the researcher read through the statements (incidents or units) seeking to identify major categories and concepts. The initial type of coding in a research project is open coding which seeks to generate categories and concepts that fit the data (Strauss, 1987).
3. As the statements were read and reread, categories and concepts emerging from these statements were compared with categories and concepts that had previously emerged allowing the researcher to combine, divide, or identify new categories and concepts.

4. Upon arriving at a point where no new categories or concepts emerged, the researcher engaged in more selective coding. Selective coding refers to "coding systematically and concertedly for the core category" (Strauss, 1987, p. 33).
5. Subsequent to coding for the core category, selective coding then yields subcategories (Strauss, 1987, p. 74).

Reliability and validity

In qualitative research, "there are no straightforward tests for reliability and validity" (Patton, 1990, p. 372). Instead one looks at the trustworthiness of the study which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The credibility of a study depends upon careful and rigorous methods for gathering and analyzing high-quality data; the skill, competence, training, and experience of the researcher; and the researcher's philosophical belief in and appreciation of qualitative research (Patton, 1990).

Triangulation allows the research to be more reliable and valid through the researcher comparing and cross-checking the consistency of the data on an ongoing basis (Patton, 1990; Morse, 1994).

Transferability of a study's findings is accomplished by providing a thick description of the data which allows others to decide whether the results can be generalized to a particular group. The researcher provided the data while readers of the study's results judge whether the findings are transferable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The dependability of a study is established through an inquiry audit in which a qualified person outside the study examines the process of data collection and analysis and the results of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The research is valid if an explanation of the data fits the

description of the data (Janesick, 1994, p. 216). For the present study, the data collection and analysis was reviewed by an individual experienced in qualitative research to insure a rigorous procedure.

The comfirmability of the present inquiry is accomplished by the researcher keeping an audit trail. The audit trail includes raw data and any notes or materials used in the data collection and analysis.

Results

Six categories related to the understanding of postmodernism in family therapy literature emerged from the data. These categories include: 1) postmodernism as a descriptor of the world or a culture, 2) postmodernism and its relationship with modernism or social constructionism, 3) recognition of versions of postmodernism, 4) postmodern ideas and characteristics, 5) postmodernism as a current trend in family therapy, and 6) concerns related to postmodernism (see Table 2). Within the core category of postmodern characteristics, twenty-six distinctions emerged (see Table 3). Where appropriate, these characteristics were further distinguished as either a general characteristic or a characteristic related to therapy. Specific examples of understandings will be presented by category.

Postmodernism as a descriptor of the world, an era, or culture

In seven articles, nineteen references were found in which postmodernism is used as a word that describes, in some manner, the present world or contemporary society or culture (A6, D1, D3, D16, D17, K11, L6, L20, L21, L24, L27, L29, L34, M5, O36, Y3, Y4, Y5, Y13). The postmodern era has evolved due to an ever-increasing disenchantment with the social, religious, economic, and political grand narratives of our time" (Doan, 1998, pp. 381-

Table 2. Emergent categories of postmodern ideas and characteristics found in family therapy literature

	Number of articles in which this category appears	Total number of references
Postmodernism as a descriptor of world or culture	7	19
Postmodernism and its relationship to modernism and social constructionism	7	19
Recognition of versions of postmodernism	5	10
Postmodernism as current trend in family therapy	18	26
Concerns related to postmodernism	12	34
Postmodern ideas or characteristics	22	185

382). At the same time, it is claimed that a postmodern social or political regime is devoid of the deeper moral questions of life and existence (L24). The postmodern landscape is noted for its bewildering, fragmented and unpredictable events (O36). The postmodern culture is like a "labyrinth of endless reflections and circularity" (Lowe, 1990, p. 5). Alternatively, it is a world where people who have traditionally been marginalized are finding their voice and speaking out against oppressive social and cultural discourses (D16, D17).

> Indeed, it is the very absence of compelling evidence of any pivotal vantage point that is giving rise to one of the most striking phenomena of the post-modern world: the spectacle of hitherto marginalized groups and people discovering that there is no longer any force compelling or persuasive enough to keep them on the margins of society (Parry, 1991, p. 40).

Table 3. Characteristics of postmodernism found in family therapy literature

	Number of articles referencing the characteristic	Number of comments
Denies an objective frame of reference	9	25
Emphasizes the arbitrary, fragmented, and provisional	8	17
Utilizes a story, narrative, text or discourse metaphor	9	16
Emphasizes language	5	19
Emphasizes meaning-making	5	6
Seeks liberation for the marginalized	9	18
Attentive to meaning and power	10	16
Encourages alternative views and voices	7	17
Encourages endless and inventive play	4	12
Utilizes deconstruction or decentering	3	11
With regard to reality	8	16
With regard to relativism	4	5
Merges fact and fiction	2	3
With regard to knowledge	5	11
With regard to the Truth	10	19
Lacks epistemological limits	2	3
Denies existence of essences	3	3
Denies a transcendent Other	2	2
With regard to the Real	3	4
Seeks a non-hierarchical posture	7	9
Seeks to be non-elitist	1	1
Rejects ideology of observer/observed	4	7
Encourages self-reflexivity	3	4
With regard to the self	6	10
With regard to techniques	3	6
Emphasizes client ability and creativity	2	3

The postmodern world typically values diversity, plurality, and choice (K11) while simultaneously asserting that objective or transcendental frames of reference are not available

(A6, D1, D3, Y5). Said Parry (1991), life in a postmodern world "lacks any objective frame of reference" (p. 37) and is devoid of "any consensus concerning a fixed reference point" (p. 38).

Postmodern theories are described as useful toward resisting the modern perils of global commodification of all facets of social life (L27). Best and Kellner (1992) suggest that "the new stage of techno-capitalism which (through science, the media, the control of information, computers, etc.)" (p. 13) is transforming all societies. On the other hand, postmodern theory is viewed as contributing to a pervasive cultural malaise characterized by relativism, skepticism, and nihilism (L21).

Postmodernism desires a radical break from modernist culture (L6). "Like postmodernists in general, they desire a radical break with the modernist philosophy that has informed Western culture since the Enlightenment" (Best and Kellner as cited in Larner, 1994, p. 11). However, the postmodern critique is said to operate within a binary logic which consequently precludes it from being thought of as a break from modernism (L34, M5). "In talking of deconstruction, as a taking apart or overthrow of modernism, postmodernists repeat the violence, which derives from *opposing* one theory and ideology to the other" (Larner, 1995, p. 195). "As the obverse of modernism, post-modernism still operates within a binary logic and cannot be thought of as a break or rupture from modernism at all" (Larner, 1994, pp. 13-14). Even the agenda of postmodern family therapists is framed using the typical modernist binary structure (L29). "The cybernetic versus post-cybernetic agenda set by post-modernists in family therapy is itself paradoxically typical of modernist binary-rational thinking" (Larner, 1994, p. 13). On the other hand, it is said that postmodernism, as a prescriptive effort, is necessarily organized as a hierarchy to opposed modernist assumptions

which, in turn, leads unavoidably to a dualistic or binary relationship (L20, L29). "The constraint is not so much cybernetics (as Anderson and Goolishian (1992) suggest), but the binary thought of our culture in which the modern/post-modern debate is framed" (Larner, 1994, p. 12). Moreover, with regard to postmodernism and therapy, Doan (1998) said, "The postmodern work is one that lacks a legitimate yardstick against which to measure one's own and other's therapeutic styles and practices" (p. 384).

Postmodernism and its relationship to modernism or social constructionism

Modernism

Found in eight articles were twenty references with regard to postmodernism's relationship to modernism (C1, I2, I3, I4, I5, I6, L6, L12, L16, L21, L34, M4, M8, N6, N8, N17, N20, O13, T5, AE6).

In general. Postmodernism has been characterized as being counter to, repudiating, being opposed to, a radical critique of, a break from, a movement beyond the assumptions of modernism (I3, I4, I5, I6, L6, L12, L16, N8, N17, N20). "To say that a particular idea is postmodernist simply denotes its general difference to opposition to modernist assumptions, rather than being a specific definition in itself" (Flaskas, 1994, p. 144). "The implication is that for deconstructive philosophy, the old story of modernism is exposed, debunked and pushed aside in favour of a newer post-modern perspective" (Larner, 1994, p. 12).

The concepts of postmodernism are complex and not without ambiguity but I want, to use a relatively simple—though central—definition borrowed from Lowe (1991) who, in part, sees postmodernism as providing a radical critique of the modernist

assumption that 'knowledge is about something external to the knower and can present itself objectively to the knower' (Pocock, 1995, p. 154).

"Postmodernism is a useful critique of modernist endeavour" (Pocock, 1995, p. 169). Postmodernism implies the modernism is dead (C1). "In certain respects, our present dialogue is congenial to the movement known as postmodernism—with its implication that modernism is now dead and new perspectives are in the making" (Hoffman, 1991, p. 4). On the other hand, a view exists that sees continuity between modernity and postmodernity (AE6). Salvador Minuchen, responding to an article by Carlos Sluzki, said he was reminded "that continuity exists, that there is an 'I' as well as relational selves, and that there is continuity between modernity and postmodernity" (Minuchen, 1999, p. 14). Distinctions are also made regarding the language particular to modernism and postmodernism (M8). "This compels us to oppose 'modernism' as a concern with what is real, true and knowable, to 'postmodernism' as a concern with narrative, meaning, and language" (Larner, 1995, p. 196). Critical theorists, however, challenge the claim that postmodernism is a break or rupture with modernism (L21, L34). "Like some feminist thinkers who consider issues of violence, power and gender as social realities (e.g. Lovibond, 1989; Goldner et al., 1990; Goldner, 1993), critical social theorists have also challenged what they see as grand claims for a postmodernity disjunctive with modernism" (Larner, 1994, p. 13). Similarly, there is a view that the postmodern desire of a break with modernism simply takes it further into modernism (M4). "Paradoxically, the very desire of postmodernist to *break* with modernism takes them further into it (Larner, 1994a)" (Larner, 1995, p. 195).

With regard to therapy. The postmodern therapist opposes the modernist assumption of an external and knowable reality (I6, N8). "It has been the opposition to this modernist commitment to an external and knowable reality which has really been the central intersection point for systemic therapy with postmodernism" (Flaskas, 1994, p. 144). "Postmodern (or narrative) family therapists are critical about modern assumptions that family process may be objectively described" (Pocock, 1995, p. 153). The postmodern ideas offer the therapist a position from which he or she can provide social critiques (T5). "Postmodern ideas offer many therapists a clinical position that integrates and accomplishes social critique" (Kogan & Gale, 1997, p. 102). Postmodern therapists have broken with modernist therapy by using the potential of language and narrative as a means of emancipation and deconstruction (O13). "Postmodern therapists, particularly family systems therapists, have focused their claims of a break from modernist therapeutic orthodoxy on the emancipatory and deconstructionist potential of their concern with language and 'narrative'" (Frosh, 1995, p. 176).

Social constructionism

Nine articles were found that possessed a total of seventeen comments about postmodernism's relationship to social constructionism (C5, I8, I11, L8, O55, Q7, S9, S10, S12, T1, T9, Y9, Y15, AD5, AD6, AD11, AD18). In some instances, no distinction is made between postmodernism and social constructionism, rather they are used interchangeably, separated only by a comma or a slash (Q7, S9, S12, Y15, AD3, AD5, AD11, AD18). "The post-modernist/social constructionist perspective ..." (Hart, 1995, p. 185). " ...with postmodern, social constructionist thinking ..." (Pare, 1996, p. 29). "The postmodern and social construction challenge ..." (Anderson, 1999, p. 3). "A postmodern—social construction

perspective ..." (Anderson, 1999, p. 7). In another instance, the term 'postmodern' qualifies 'social constructionist' (M12). "Foucault, a postmodern social constructionist replaces talk ..." (Larner, 1995, p. 198). Three articles suggest that postmodernism is attached as a descriptor to identify those therapists who view language as a social construction (O55, T9) or who assume a self-reflexive stance in the development of approaches (Q7). "The postmodern 'emphasis on language as the medium of social construction has led to the use of discourse-based metaphors for understanding the social world (Bove, 1990; Lax, 1992; Sarup, 1993)" (Kogan & Gale, 1997, p. 103). There is also an instance where postmodernism and social constructionism are seen as 'close cousins'(Y9). "Social constructionism, a close cousin of postmodernism, emphasizes ..." (Doan, 1998, p. 381). Other references imply that both terms place an emphasis upon social interactions, in the context of social and cultural practices, as generating meaning in people's lives (L8, T1, Y9). "Postmodern models of therapy stress the participation of the clinician in a nonhierarchical, non-objectifying role, and highlight the therapist's embeddedness in the same processes of social construction as are the individual and the family" (Kogan & Gale, 1997, p. 101).

In other instances, postmodernism is seen as distinct from social constructionism. One article speaks of a recursive relationship between a postmodern position and social constructionism (I11). Postmodernism acknowledges the possibilities and constraints found in a physical, social and emotional world and social constructionism views reality as being mediated through language. There is also distinction when efforts are made to describe the meshing of a postmodern position with theories of social constructionism (I8). "The work of Lynn Hoffman, and Harlene Anderson and harry Goolishian, stand out here as two concerted

attempts to lay out the way in which they are trying to mesh a postmodernist position with specific theories of social constructionism" (Flaskas, 1994; p. 144). Indeed, said Hoffman (1991), "the social construction theorists place themselves squarely in a postmodern tradition" (p. 5). Social constructions of self are described as possessing a 'postmodern flavor' (S10)

Versions of postmodernism

Seven articles possessed an aggregate of twelve references either acknowledging or distinguishing between versions of postmodernism (D6, D7, D12, M24, N7, O7, O9, O31, O33, T7, AD4, AE1). Many perspectives exist regarding what constitutes postmodernism (O9, AD4, AE1). "The diversity of positions which can or have been characterized as 'postmodernist' is very great" (Frosh, 1995, p. 175). "To begin with, I [Salvador Minuchen] lumped together different perspectives on postmodernity, as Harlene Anderson correctly pointed out, and a reading of the four responses shows how different these colleagues are from one another in their theoretical viewpoints and clinical practice" (Minuchen, 1999, p. 9). One version of postmodernism is distinguished as neo-conservative in the measure that it repudiates modernism and advocates a return to history, representation, narrative, and the subject (D6, D12). "Nearly every post-modern artist and architect (hold this position [neo-conservatism]) has resorted in the name of style and history to pastiche; indeed it is fair to say that pastiche is the official style of this post-modernist camp" (Hal Fisher as cited in Parry, 1991, p. 38). Another version of postmodernism, post-structural postmodernism, views reality and history as something to be constructed or produced through narrative rather than something that exists independently of the narrative (D7, D12). "For it [post-structural post-modernism], history (like reality) is not a given 'out there' to capture allusion, but a narrative

to construct or (better) a concept to produce" (Parry, 1991, p. 38). "Literary critic Mark Edmundson also defines two kinds of post-modernism, an earlier negative or demystifying sort, and an emerging positive or romantic expression" (Parry, 1991, p. 38). The negative or demystifying version of postmodernism seeks to describe a world where there exists no absolute perspectives or transcendental vantage points (D8, D12). A positive or romantic postmodern expression can be found in the works of Thomas Pynchon, Richard Rorty, Milan Kundera, or Salman Rushdie (D8, D12). Reference is also made to postmodern philosophies which would include social constructionism and contemporary hermeneutics (AD4). "I [Harlene Anderson] consider myself a postmodern therapist who draws from various postmodern philosophies, including social constructionism and contemporary hermeneutic premises, to describe and explain my approach" (Anderson, 1999, p. 8).

Foucault and Baudrillard are said to advocate an extreme form of postmodernism which encourages a complete break with modernity in contrast to a version which seeks to reconstruct modernity (M24). "Here the authors draw an important distinction between extreme post-modernists such as Baudrillard and Foucault who want a complete break with modernity, and those who are content to reconstruct modernism" (Larner, 1994, p. 13). The postmodern ideas of Foucault, Derrida, and Lyotard are said to share an anti-objectivist and anti-foundational posture with regard to what is knowable in the world (T7). "In common, they [Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jean Francois Lyotard] share an anto-objectivist, antifoundational stance with regard to what is knowable in the world" (Kogan & Gale, 1997, p. 102). Postmodernism is sometimes used interchangeably with poststructuralism (N7). There is a type of postmodern that emphasizes the fragmented nature of contemporary human

experience (O31). "Postmodernism of this kind emphasizes the fragmented nature of contemporary experience—fragments which are exciting but which are also meaningless in their interchangeability and lack of significant relationship to one another" (Frosh, 1995, p. 182). There is also a version that plays with language and story-telling and another that focuses upon space (O33). "However, there is another dimension of postmodernism which need more emphasis, to counter the sense that all there is to it is a celebration of fragmentation, playfulness and relativism" (Frosh, 1995, p. 182). The version that focuses upon space is only now emerging and emphasizes a perspective that counters the celebration of fragmentation, playfulness and relativism (O33). "Another characteristic of the postmodern vision, its focus on *space*, is something the implications of which are only just being spelt out" (Frosh, 1995, p. 182).

Postmodernism as a current trend in family therapy

Twenty articles were found that made thirty-two references to postmodernism as a current trend in family therapy (B1, C1, D13, D18, F1, H1, I12, J1, K20, L4, M2, M17, N2, N19, O1, O7, O8, O14, Q7, Q8, T2, S9, V1, V3, Y12, AA1, AD6, AD12, AD13, AD15, AD17, AE7).

Postmodernism and its relationship to family therapy as a current trend (B1, C1, D13, J1, T2, AD1, AE7) has been described from an increasingly popular and important notion (M17, O7, Y12) to a less favorable new 'vogue' (H1), to a theory that ought to be examined with a critical eye (AD2), to a practice fundamentally at odds with therapy (I12).

This current development in systemic therapy has been influenced not only by developments in cybernetic thinking, particularly the 'second-order cybernetics' of von

> Forester, but also by the writings of Prigogine in physics and Maturana and Varella in biology, by 'post-modern' aesthetics in art and literature, and by anthropological interest in narrative" (Real, 1990, p. 257).

"Recent developments in family therapy represent one of the flowerings of post-modernism and perhaps its natural therapeutic expression, as psychoanalysis was of modernism" (Parry, 1991, p. 39). "To sum up: The trust of my paper was on the way in which a social theory [postmodernism] has been imported into the field of family therapy, on the translation of its concepts into a guideline for understanding family functions and shaping the art and craft of clinical practice" (Minuchen, 1999, p. 14). By attaching itself to a narrative/conversational mode, "family therapy has been overtaken by the vogue of postmodernism, which already pervades literary and social criticism, and has found its way into the social sciences" (Fish, 1993, p. 222).

Postmodernism is said to already have had a substantial impact upon family therapy (O1, V1, V3, AA1) and possess considerable utility for clinical practice. "Family therapy is becoming increasingly influenced by post-modernism and constructionist thought" (Smith, 1998, p. 153). "We want to welcome Salvador Minuchen's voice as it joins all the other voices that are telling the story of how social constructionist, narrative, and postmodern ideas have affected the practice of family therapy" (Combs & Freedman, 1998, p. 405). In particular, postmodernism is credited as the watershed for therapies designated as collaborative, narrative, or solution-focused (AD6). "In one form or another the postmodern influence, whether social-constructionism, postmodernism, or post-structuralism, has been the turning point for therapies designated as collaborative, narrative, and solution-focused"

(Anderson, 1999, p. 3). The move from a modernist/systems model to a postmodern/language-based model has been described by some theorists and practitioners (F1, L4) and urged by others (D18, M2, N12, O14). "This article asserts that the family therapy field is approaching an epistemological shift from structuralism and positivism to postmodernism and relativism" (Hardy, 1993, p. 9). "And Lowe (1991), I think sensibly, speaks of the need to engage with the ideas of the postmodern movement, rather than embracing or dismissing them wholesale" (Pocock, 1995, p. 157). "The post-modern sensibility offers a propitious context for the transition to a narrative paradigm for family therapy on several additional counts" (Parry, 1991, p. 41). While there is one view that suggests the current trend of postmodernism may allow a rethinking of old theoretical divisions (N2), another wonders if postmodernism is not simply recasting old ideas in more fashionable terms (O8). "It is a central argument in this paper that the application of postmodern ideas to family therapy can allow a rethinking of such old theoretical divisions" (Pocock, 1995, p. 151). "However, there must be doubts over the extent to which the infiltration of the therapeutic field by postmodernist discourse is a substantive advance, rather than a recasting of the traditional psychotherapeutic dilemmas in more fashionable terms" (Frosh, 1995, p. 175). Additionally, it is suggested that the current interest in postmodernism in family therapy is motivated by the desire to eliminate the hierarchy between therapist and family (N19); the desire to encourage a more reflexive stance in therapeutic thinking and practices (Q7); the desire to invite a greater connection with broader social and cultural issues (AD12); the desire to reconceptualize therapeutic practice (AD13); the desire to transcend the individual—social system dualism (AD15); and the desire to champion the new, the expanded

and the revolutionary (AD17). "The post-modernist/social constructionist perspective has encouraged a self-reflexive stance for the development of our approaches (Lax, 1993; Hoffman, 1993) enabling us to take a more evaluative stance on our thinking and practice" (Hart, 1995, p. 185). "It [postmodernism] invites connection and response to broader cultural and social contexts ans issues" (Anderson, 1999, p. 7). This perspective [postmodernism—social constructionism] yields possibilities for new ways to reconceptualize our practices and to reconsider how we are and want to be in relationship with others" (Anderson, 1999, p. 7). "As a form of inquiry, postmodernism encourages us as family therapists to carry on our tradition of reimagining, to 'continue championing the new, the expanded and the revolutionary as opposed to the accepted, the traditional and the secure' (Gergen, 1998, p. 734)" (Anderson, 1999, p. 7).

Postmodern characteristics

Twenty-two articles contained an aggregate of 185 references to some idea or characteristic said to be postmodern. From those 185 references, twenty-six categories of ideas or characteristics emerged that may have been furthered distinguished as either general or with regard to therapy.

Postmodern denies an objective frame of reference

Nine articles possessed twenty-five comments related to posmodernism's denial of an objective frame of reference (D1, D3, D8, D9, D14, H2, I4, I5, I7, L7, N5, N6, N8, N16, O3, O34, O37, O39, O40, S5, T1, T2, T7, T8, Y8).

In general. As a descriptor, postmodernism describes a world where there is no longer any consensus regarding an objective frame of reference or a transcendental vantage point

(D1, D3, D8, Y8). "At the very height of modern's sway, Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God was already setting the agenda of what has come to be known as post-modernism: what it means to live in a world where there in no longer any consensus concerning a fixed reference point" (Parry, 1991, p. 38). "Postmodernists live in a multi-verse, and are highly suspicious of those claiming privileged access to a uni-verse" (Doan, 1998, p. 381). In the postmodern world, it is not possible to achieve any rational distance that would provide the space needed to be objective (L7, O34, O37, O39, O40, S5). "Post-modernism answers the age-old questions of ontology (what 'exists'?) and epistemology (what can subjects know?) by denying that a real world, 'out there,' can be known objectively, outside our texts, language and social discourse about it" (Larner, 1994, p. 12). Zizek "argues that what is most terrifying about postmodernity is not just the gaps and absences in people's lives—a phenomenon perhaps most poignantly evoked by modernist visions of alienation—but the way everything is wrapped up together so closely that distance is disallowed" (Frosh, 1995, p. 183). As prescriptive, postmodernism exhorts movement beyond the modernist commitment of describing an objective reality and the accompanying hope of discovering universal truths (D9, I5, I7, N16). "The demystifying post-moderns exhorted us not to replace the deity or some equivalent absolute perspective with some other truth like science, objectivity, or even something subterranean" (Parry, 1991, p. 39). "Postmodernism can restrain us from modern follies—believing in objective knowledge and attempting to capture absolute truth" (Pocock, 1995, p. 159). Postmodernism actively critiques modernist assumptions (I4, N8, T8). "To say that a particular idea is postmodernist simply denotes its general difference or opposition to modernist assumptions, rather than being a specific

definition in itself" (Flaskas, 1994, p. 144). "Questioning the 'grand narrative' that, by employing reason and scientific method, we may come to know or even more closely approximate an objective reality (Lyotard, 1979), postmodernism proposes that we live in a world of multiple realities (Hoffman, 1990)" (Kogan & Gale, 1997, p. 102).

With regard to therapy. Postmodernism asserts that there is no objective reality available to be described by clients or accessible to therapists (D14, N6, T2).

> In moving from a typically modernist first-order to a characteristically post-modern second-order cybernetics explicitly built on the realization that there is no privileged position or neutral vantage point from which to observe or practice, nor an objective reality being described by clients or accessible to therapist, family therapy may, at least, have found its voice and come into its own as a uniquely post-modern therapy. (Parry, 1991, p. 39)

"Postmodern (or narrative) family therapists are critical about modern assumptions that family process may be objectively described" (Pocock, 1995, p. 153). Family theories, which rely upon a postmodern interpretive view, typically utilize non-objectivist metaphors derived from the humanities and social sciences (H2, T7). "Originally a movement in the humanities, postmodernism incorporates the critiques of 'modernity' ..." (Sarup as cited in Kogan & Gale, 1997, p. 102). Although the therapist working from a postmodern position is not precluded from exploring deeper issues, he or she does not attempt to objectively depict reality (N5).

> These are modernist-sounding concepts which attempt to explain surface phenomena by proposing an influential structure beneath the surface (cf. Postmodernism which is exclusively concerned with surfaces), but that does not necessarily mean that therapists

> who work by exploring deeper issues believe that they can discover absolute truth or can objectively depict reality. (Pocock, 1995, p. 153)

Furthermore, the therapist assumes a non-objectifying role and emphasizes his or her participation in the social interaction (T1, N6). "Postmodern models of therapy stress the participation of the clinician in a nonhierarchical, non-objectifying role, and highlight the therapist's embeddedness in the same processes of social construction as are the individual and the family." (Kogan & Gale, 1997, p. 101)

Postmodernism's fragmentary, arbitrary or provisional nature

Eight articles with seventeen references were found regarding postmodernism's emphasis upon the fragmentary, arbitrary or provisional (D6, I2, K4, L24, O6, O17, O28, O31, O33, O36, O38, O45, O48, O62, S5, W1, X16).

In general. As a descriptor, postmodernism suggests that arbitrariness, uncertainty, and irrationality are constitutive of the human experience (O38). "Whereas modernism focuses on loss and on the difficulty of finding meaning in things, postmodernism suggests that arbitrariness is the essence of experience, and that this arbitrariness, uncertainty and irrationality is something from which we cannot escape" (Frosh, 1995, p. 184). As a consequence of a world that possesses a bewildering number of unpredictable and fragmented symbols and events as well as an increased emphasis on the contemporary rather than the traditional, a person's sense of self may be more uncertain and less defined than in times past (K4, O36, L24). A philosophy that emphasizes uncertainty, risk and constant revision of self-narratives "contributes to a fragmentation of personal identity and a post-modern political-social regime devoid of the deeper moral questions of life and existence" (Larner, 1994, p.

13). Postmodernism favors a stance that is non-objectivist, non-foundational, and perspectival (S5). All positions are provisional (O48). Postmodernism "does not recognize the executive faculty implied by modernism: no truths reside below the surface of these bubbling voices, no detective can unlock the clues to find the real murderer" (Frosh, 1995, p. 187). Prescriptively, postmodernism encourages a dismantling of the claim that language masks an immutable structure and, instead, emphasizes the arbitrary and fragmented nature of contemporary experience (O17, O28, O31). "Postmodernist theory takes issue with the entire interpretive endeavour, arguing that it is based on a wish to make connections between things which are not in fact connect—that human experience, to the extent that it can be said to have an 'essence,' is always arbitrary and fragmentary" (Frosh, 1995, p. 181).

With regard to therapy. For some, a postmodern therapist would likely champion the powerful postmodern critique that celebrates pastiche, fragmentation, irrationalism, and relativism (O6, D6, W1). "This state of affairs should be welcomed, as a truly 'postmodern' mode of therapy would probably celebrate irrationality" (Frosh, 1995, p. 175). "In the past decade, many family therapists have abandoned a systemic metaphor in favor of a narrative metaphor to organize and describe the work that they do (Hoffman, 1993; White & Epston, 1990; Zimmerman & Dickerson, 1994), and have adopted a postmodern rather than a modernist worldview to better reflect their sense that knowledge is 'multiple, fragmentary, context-dependent, and local' (Hare-Mustin, 1994)" (Weingarten, 1998, p. 3). On the other hand, a therapist must act with his or her clients in a way that meaningfulness is available (O62). "We might recognize the power of the postmodernist critique of this position—the dangers of ignoring the crocodile's existence—but if we are to avoid the kind of psychotic

celebration of irrationalism advocated by some postmodernists, we have to keep on trying to help people live as if meaning can survive" (Frosh, 1995, p. 190). Postmodernism is useful to the therapist by creating the awareness that looking underneath the surface for a true meaning is both a misguided and possibly authoritarian activity (O33). "The postmodern opposition to depth interpretation is well understood—the claim that looking underneath the surface for a true meaning is a misguided and potentially authoritarian activity" (Frosh, 1995, p. 182). The postmodern therapist emphases 'polyvocality' which then allows for the presence of contradiction, disparity, and conflict (X16, O45). "This is another postmodern theme in solution-focused therapy, one that stresses how understanding and effective action sometimes involve uncertainty, paradox, and contradiction" (Miller & de Shazer, 1998, p. 374).

Stories, narratives, texts, or discourses

Ten articles possessing seventeen comments were found referencing postmodernism's utilization of story, narrative, text or discourse as a conceptualizing metaphor (C4, C11, D2, D22, I7, K13, K18, L7, L11, L24, N1, O49, T11, T16, W8, W21, X13).

In general. Postmodernism utilizes the language of story, narrative, discourse, and text (C4, I7, L7, T11, T16). "Because postmodern and poststructural ideas were originated by people in semiotics and literary criticism, it is becoming increasingly common, in talking of social fields of study, to use the analogy of a narrative or text" (Hoffman, 1991, p. 4). "Indeed, in much of the system literature, a simple recounting of the postmodernist opposition to the idea of a single objective reality becomes the launch pad for an elaboration and justification of a new description of the therapeutic process, often couched in the metaphors of narrative" (Flaskas, 1994, p. 144). "Postmodern therapists deploy these ideas through the

metaphors of story, narrative, conversations, myth, and text" (Kogan & Gale, 1997, p. 103). Postmodernism privileges marginalized and alternative discourses and stories (C11). It also favors those stories that are constructed through a mutual and dialogical effort (C11). "Because post-modern ethnography privileges 'discourse' over 'text,' it foregrounds dialogue as opposed to monologue, and emphasizes the cooperative and collaborative nature of the ethnographic situation ..." (Clifford & Marcus as cited in Hoffman, 1991, pp. 15-16). Stories are viewed as malleable and, therefore, endlessly inventive (D2, D22, L11, L24). "In the post-modern sensibility, the story is set free to perform as simply a story that allows for re-invention as the story teller finds a voice rooted in the person's own experience and in the connection of her story to those of others, and to larger stories of future and humanity" (Parry, 1991, p. 37). An alternative understanding suggests that the postmodern condition precludes a better narrative, a more constructive way of being, or a more fully developed self (O49). "But the promises of a better narrative, a more constructive way of being, or a fuller and more developed self are not available under postmodern conditions" (Frosh, 195, p. 187). Postmodernism suspects any story that claims to have captured absolute truth (N1). "The concept of *better story* is used to replace both the polarized position of an objective discoverable truth and the polarized postmodern position of all stories having equal validity" (Pocock, 1995, p. 149).

With regard to therapy. The postmodern narrative therapist operates on the assumption that attentive listening to a client's telling and re-telling of his or her story, alternatives will emerge (W8, X13).

> The postmodern narrative therapist has faith that, in the course of telling and re-telling one's story, in the course of listening and being listened to, in the course responding and being responded to with thoughtfulness, care, and passion, alternatives to the troubling story—the problem-saturated story (White & Epston, 1990)—will emerge (Weingarten, 1998, p. 4).

"These questions—which are based on the postmodern assumptions that problems and solutions are talked into being—are neither glib nor disrespectful" (Miller & de Shazer, 1998, p. 373). Discourses are seen by postmodernists as socially constructed systems of thought that may influence people without their conscious awareness of it (K13, K18, W8, W21). "Values infuse all knowing, leading postmodernists to ask not only what is concealed by dominant discourses but also why it is concealed" (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 30). "I have drawn on postmodern ideas to suggest ways of increasing therapists' awareness of the often unacknowledged but prevailing discourses concerning the relations of men and women" (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 31).

Emphasis on language

Six articles made twenty references to postmodernism's emphasis upon language (O2, O4, O6, O12, O17, O19, O21, O40, O43, O44, O53, O57, O58, O61, T8, T9, W17, X14, AC3, AD3).

In general. Postmodernism seeks to describe and understand the social world through the use of discourse-based metaphors which point to social constructions mediated through language as the means of creating, organizing and maintaining social realities (T8, T9, AC3). "Many practices informed by postmodernism, I insist, include the family as a central

contributor in the never-ending process of reality construction, maintenance, and change" (Sluzki, 1998, p. 417). The postmodern "emphasis on language as the medium of social construction has led to the use of discourse-based metaphors for understanding the social world (Bove, 1990; Lax, 1992; Sarup, 1993)" (Kogan & Gale, 1997, p. 103). Postmodernism is a form of inquiry which seeks to examine the role of language in the creation, ascension, and suppression of knowledge (AD3).

> Broadly speaking, postmodernism, and social constructionism are forms of inquiry devoted to examination of two fundamental concepts, *knowledge* and *language*: what we know or think we might know, the ways in which knowledge is created, the privileging and suppressing of knowledge, and the role of language in these (Anderson, 1999, p. 2).

Another version of postmodernism asserts that language is unable to describe the Real, cannot be seen as objective, and consequently, is always inadequate (O19, O57, O58). "So, postmodernism shows how it is no longer possible to regard language as transparent; rather, it is imbued with passion and its rhetoric is part of its meaning" (Frosh, 1995, p. 189). This type of postmodernism asserts that language is an insufficient means of embracing experience and, therefore, celebrates difference, heterogeneity, and what lies outside of language (O17, O40). "The modernist approach is as much about language as it the postmodernist; the difference is that modernism espouses the possibility of making sense of experience by achieving at least some rational distance" (Frosh, 1995, p. 184).

With regard to therapy. Postmodern therapists emphasize the productive capacities of language, particularly the constitutive, performative or interpretive nature of language (O2,

O44, X14, W17). "As described earlier, those therapists calling themselves 'postmodern' have focused mainly on the constitutive or performing nature of language—how language creates its speakers, positioning people as subjects in relation to one another, and to something over and above themselves" (Frosh, 1995, p. 185). "Postmodern narrative work relies on language and is an interpretive practice" (Weingarten, 1998, p. 6). A postmodern therapy that claims language is an insufficient means of embracing experience would focus upon irrational components in therapy instead of the rational endeavor of meaning-making (O6, O61). "What, in contrast, might it mean to emphasize, in postmodern mode, the irrational components in therapy over the rationalist enterprise of finding words to express things?" (Frosh, 1995, p. 189). A postmodern therapist that believes language is inadequate to embrace experience would operate out of the awareness that words will always be insufficient and, consequently, contribute to misperceptions (O4, O12, O21, O43, O53, O58). "Postmodernism takes as a central concern the limits of symbolization, so a postmodern therapy would deal primarily with failures of language" (Frosh, 1995, p. 175). "These problems can be summarized in the comparison between therapeutic approaches such as family systems therapy, which are concerned with finding ways to make symbolic sense of experience via language, and a theory (postmodernism) concerned, in the final analysis, with what happens when language breaks down" (Frosh, 1995, p. 176).

Interpretive, meaning-making aspect of postmodernism

Five articles were found with six references regarding the meaning-making aspect of postmodernism (H2, O28, O30, S3, W17, X14). An emphasis of postmodernism is meaning-making which it considers an interpretive practice based upon human experience (H2, S3,

W17, X14). Postmodernism emphasizes the "interpretive, meaning-making aspect of experience" (Pare, 1996, p. 26). "Postmodern narrative work relies on language and is an interpretive practice" (Weingarten, 1998, p. 6). Postmodernism claims that "meaning always involves interpretation, meanings can change" (Miller & de Shazer, 1998, p. 373). A less common view, however, claims that postmodern theory runs counter to and challenges an interpretative endeavor where it seeks to make connections between human experiences that are essentially arbitrary and fragmented (O28, O30). "And it is this 'seduction by appearances' which is, according to Baudrillard, a central mechanism of the postmodernist process, a mechanism that works in the opposite direction from the interpretive project" (Frosh, 1995, 181).

Seeks liberation for the marginalized

Ten articles with eighteen comments were found that commented upon the postmodern feature of emancipation or liberation (C6, C7, D17, D22, H3, K10, K15, K17, M13, M14, M15, M19, M20, O13, O22, Q6, X14, Y7).

In general. Postmodernism seeks emancipation from injustice and oppression found in social and cultural practices (D17, K10, M14, Y7). "Feminist postmodernists have focused on the way dominant discourses produce and sustain the status of those who have power against the competing discourses of those on the margins of society, like women, ethnic minorities, old people, and poor people" (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 21). "Postmodernism refuses the certainty and hierarchy of modernity, because it masks hegemonic practices that lead to injustice, oppression and marginalization in society". (Larner, 1995, p. 206). "If postmodernism has a rallying cry, it is most likely 'beware of the tyranny of singular

accounts'—especially those claiming to have the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" (Doan, 1998, p. 381). A feature of postmodernism is the claim that assumptions inherent in social and cultural practices are often taken for granted (X14). A claim of postmodernism found in solution-focused therapy assumes "that all language games involve assumptions that are taken-for-granted by the 'players' themselves" (Miller & de Shazer, 1998, p. 373). Postmodernists argue that their aim to challenge abuses of power and knowledge is informed by ethical concerns (K15, K17, M13, M15). "Thus for postmodernists, judgments about discursive practices are based not on their truth-value but on their function and ethical implications" (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 30). "The postmodern spirit is an ethical concern for the abuse of knowledge and power for personal, ideological or political ends" (Larner, 1995, p. 205).

With regard to therapy. The postmodern therapist participates in conversation that will help free a client from discourses that either have or have the potential to constrain, exploit, or control their lives (D22, H3, O13, Q6, M19, M20). "The post-modern treatment of a story as simply a story, hence something endlessly inventive, offers the narrative therapist a tool for enabling clients to shake off constraining beliefs so that they can live their stories henceforth as they choose" (Parry, 1991, p. 44). "What is common to all practitioners, modern or postmodern, is an awareness of the potential abuse of privilege inherent in any theory or technology" (Larner, 1995, p. 210). "To resist powerful forces of oppression and injustice in society (e.g. patriarchy, violence), therapists must be powerful and knowing, while being non-powerful and non-knowing in therapeutic conversation" (Larner, 1995, p. 210). Feminists have found postmodernism useful to challenge the colonial mentality found in the field of

mental health and the bias against women in the language of therapy (C6, C7). "Feminists have joined the attack, finding in the arguments of the postmodern thinkers, especially the theories of Foucault, ample ammunition for their insistence that the very language of therapy is biased against women" (Hoffman, 1991, p. 5). Yet another view asserts that postmodernism and therapy operate on different trajectories and have little to do with each other (O22). Frosh (1995) suggests "that psychotherapy has little to do, essentially, with postmodernism—and that that is just as it should be" (p. 178).

Meaning and power

Eleven articles possessing seventeen comments regarding meaning and power were found in the literature (C10, K2, K8, L8, L18, M8, M12, M13, N19, O59, Q5, S5, S7, S11, W5, AE5).

In general. Postmodernism suggests that power, which acts to privilege some voices and views while silencing others, is found in social discourses and constituted as knowledge (K2, K8, L8, M8, M12, S7, S11). "The ideas of many feminist theorists converge with those of postmodern thinkers who have drawn attention to the relation of meaning and power" (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 21). "Foucault, a postmodern social constructionist replaces talk of the reality of power with the discursive: power is in conversation and discourse" (Larner, 1995, p. 205). "Power is seen as playing a central role in privileging some voices or stories while silencing others" (Pare, 1996, p. 27). Constitutive to postmodernism are "issues of hierarchy and power, gender and other cultural specificatons, responsibility and accountability" (Pare, 1996, p. 38). Where these discourses gain ascendancy, an ideological

hegemony emerges (L18). "A discourse involves a totalising knowledge or hegemony, if it is imbued with power and turned into ideology (Eagleton, 1991)" (Larner, 1994, p. 12).

With regard to therapy. The postmodern therapist attempts to minimize the hierarchical power differential present in a therapeutic relationship by avoiding an expert position (C10, N19, W5). " ...the idea of reducing the status of the interviewer is also a postmodern one" (Hoffman, 1991, p. 13). "The growing interest in a postmodern family therapy seems, at least, partly motivated by a wish to eliminate the hierarchy between therapist and family, to avoid expertness and the exercise of therapeutic influence through power and control (Hoffman, 1985, 1990)" (Pocock, 1995, p. 168). Additionally, the postmodern therapist is aware of the abusive uses of power found in social discourses and cultural practices (O59, Q5). "White is not alone in the development of his ideas on power and the post-modern influences" (Hart, 1995, p. 184). A criticism of some postmodern clinicians is that they hold all organized authority as suspect (AE5). "It seems that, in the view of some postmodern clinicians, all organized authority is questionable, all expertise is power, and the use of power is always for increasing power" (Minuchen, 1999, p. 13). Another view holds that the debate regarding power in family therapy is more appropriately situated as a broader ethical question than a question to be framed within a postmodern/modern debate (M13). "In this section, the debate over power in family therapy is located outside the modern/postmodern dichotomy as a wider question of ethics in relation to technology and knowledge" (Larner, 1995, p. 206).

Alternative views and voices

In eight articles, eighteen comments were found regarding postmodernism's emphasis upon alternative view and voices (D24, K3, K5, K9, K12, O3, O16, O24, O26, O45, T17, S7, W2, W10, Y1, Y6, Y14, AD12).

In general. Postmodernism is said to have contributed to the growing voice of marginalized people in a world largely dominated by the White, Western, affluent, heterosexual male (D24). "Those who have been excluded from full membership in the prevailing White, Western, affluent, heterosexual male majority, are increasingly giving voice to their own stories as self-conscious, newly proud communities of people" (Parry, 1991, p. 48). Postmodernism has been seen as a means by feminists and other oppressed peoples to encourage or privilege alternative voices (K9, S7). "Postmodernism has been seen by some feminists as a way to open up space for alternative views to those that prevail" (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 21). Postmodernism emphasizes multiple points of view, each relative the other, and is concerned with how these different views organize people's lives (K3, K5, K12, O45, Y6). "Postmodernists see numerous competing viewpoints of the world rather than one true view" (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 20). Knowledge for a postmodernist perspective is "described as an edifying conversation of varied voices rather than an accurate representation of what is 'out there'" (Hare-Mustin, 1994, 20). "Postmodern therapists emphasize 'polyvocality'" the way every meaning space is full of multiple voices, all chattering away in contradiction and disparity, and sometimes in conflict" (Frosh, 1995, p. 1986). "Nichols and Schwartz (1997) asserted that postmodernism is characterized by the view that there are no realities, only points of view, and that it is interested in how different points of view organize people's lives"

(Doan, 1998, p. 381). A postmodern stance is a fundamental option to privilege the voice of the 'other' (O3, O16, O24). "'Postmodern' family therapy is differentiated from modernist approaches by its disavowal of truth claims and its encouragement of alternative 'voices' or narratives" (Frosh, 1995, p. 175). "Rather in a pre-echo of the claims of postmodern therapists, it gave voice to 'the other': it pointed to the existence of something which could never be fully mastered or controlled" (Frosh, 1995, p. 179).

With regard to therapy. The postmodern therapist adopts language that avoids speaking about truths and instead employs language that emphases 'points of view' (T17, W2, Y1). "Consistent with a postmodern backdrop, we view the therapist's talk as constructing a sense of mutuality and multiple 'centers' for understanding the presented content" (Kogan & Gale, 1997, p. 112). "Narrative therapy has been associated with the assumptions of postmodernism and social constructionism; both of which support the notion that there are no truths, just points of view" (Doan, 1998, p. 379). The postmodern therapist invites all 'points of view' or 'various voices' (O26, AD12). "In particular, I have tried to address the notion that claims to authority and expertise characterize modernist therapies, while postmodernist work adopts a more democratic and respectful attention to the various 'voices' to be found in the client and family" (Frosh, 1995, p. 180). A postmodernist or social constructionist perspective "invites multiple voices, diversity, and differences" (Anderson, 1999, p. 7). The postmodern narrative therapist also encourages other narrative therapists to exercise their own voice (Y14). "Thus, one of the primary tasks of a postmodern, narrative therapist becomes the encouraging of other narrative therapists to exercise their voices and experience in the application of narrative assumptions" (Doan, 1998, p. 384).

Endless or inventive play

Five articles with twelve comments regarding the postmodern feature of endless or inventive play were found in the literature (A8, D21, D22, D23, L35, L39, L41, O27, O29, O33, O52, O53). Endless play and limitless inventiveness, in postmodernism, may extend to the treatment of story, story-telling, and language and also the idea of self (A8, D21, D22, D23, L35, L39, L41, O27, O33). Lowe (1990) suggests that the postmodern emphasis on endless play may result in the absence of epistemological limits unless one adopts an ethical imagination. "In a manner similar to that of the post-modern writer who, released from the metaphysical baggage that weighs down a story, can play with stories because they are only stories, the post-modern therapist can introduce clients to all the things they can do with their story-telling capacities" (Parry, 1991, p. 42). "'Playing' with language and story telling may be one version of this procedure, a version taken up in some 'postmodern family therapy'" (Frosh, 1995, p. 182). Beyond its playfulness, postmodern also evokes anxiety (O52). "Appreciation of the complexity of postmodernism, its playfulness and verve combined with its evocation of anxiety, leads in a slightly different direction" (Frosh, 1995, p. 188). Postmodernism can also be seen not as an invitation to endless re-storying but rather an argument that words will always be inadequate and the sources of misunderstanding (O29, O53). "Postmodernism is not, in this reading of things, a licence [sic] for superficiality, nor is it an invitation towards endless 'restorying'; it is rather an argument that all the words in the world can serve only to keep us apart, misperceiving each other in our narratives and storylines" (Frosh, 1995, p. 188).

Deconstruction or decentering

Three articles possessed nine references to deconstruction or decentering as related to postmodernism (L8, L9, L11, L15, L35, O13, O57, T14, T18). One postmodern practice of talk therapy seeks to decenter local and social narratives and is skeptical of universal truth claims and singular meanings (L8, T14, T18). "Post-modernists propose *new* practices and ways of thinking where notions of narrative, texts, discourse, the *social* construction of meaning, a decentred subject and the questions off [sic] all meta-narratives are paramount (Rosenau, 1991; Best and Kellner, 1991)" (Larner, 1994, p. 12). "Postmodernism critiques reject the idea that a singular meaning or essence can be derived from any phenomenon" (Kogan & Gale, 1997, p. 104). Another version suggests that postmodernism deconstructs reason believing that irrationality is a constitutive element of human experience and should be celebrated (O13, O57). "Where postmodernism takes matters on further is in its deconstruction of reason—its analysis of how irrationality is a crucial element in the coding of experience" (Frosh, 1995, p. 189). Another view holds that Derrida's ideas with regard to deconstructionism have been misunderstood by postmodernists, including those in family therapy (L9, L11, L14). "A by-product of the post-modernist enterprise in family therapy has been a misunderstanding of Derridian deconstructionism" (Larner, 1994. p. 12). "However, [Derrida's] use of the word derives from a common misunderstanding of deconstructive activity by post-modernist, as an undoing or taking-apart of a text or narrative, followed by its reconstitution into an entirely new story or meaning" (Larner, 1994, p. 12). Derrida seeks to hold the tensions of modernism and postmodernism 'in play' simultaneously (L15, L35).

"Where modernists and post-modernists are led by binary thought to privilege one position or the other, deconstruction holds both 'in play' simultaneously" (Larner, 1994, p. 14).

Reality

Eight articles possessed sixteen references to the postmodern concept regarding reality (D14, I1, I7, I10, I11, K19, L7, L36, L37, L40, N10, N16, T8, T17, Y6 AC3).

In general. Postmodernism has distinguished between physical, social and emotional realities, each of which is described by using language (I11). Postmodernism asserts that language is a social construction (I11). Flaskas (1994) argues for a position between "an idea of reality which allows for both the possibilities and restrictions created by the physical, social and emotional world, and which sees language itself as socially constructed by the world, as well as socially constructing the world" (p. 146). Some positions emphasize that all realities are then social constructions (K19). "A postmodern orientation reminds us that all realities are constructions, and some are more influential than others" (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 31). Other positions suggest that realities are mediated by language which is a social construction (T8). "Accordingly, 'reality,' as such, is context-dependent, socially constructed, and mediated or constituted primarily through language (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Flax, 1990; Gergen, 1985; Sparks, 1992)" (Kogan & Gale, 1997, p. 102). The position that sees realities as mediated by language creates a space for a view which allows for physical and social realities existing independently of their social construction (I1, I10, L40). "And I guess it's also becoming clear enough that I would be advocating that in therapy we hang on to an idea of 'external' reality/realities, and that in tackling the postmodern challenge, we hold out for the recursive possibility of the world and the subject and the space in-between" (Flaskas, 1994, p.

145). "Likewise, if modern ideas co-exist with post-modern, then the systems and structures we observe have a reality that cannot be reduced to their social construction in meaning" (Larner, 1994, p. 14). In other words, the second position argues for an extralinguistic reality that exists separate and apart from any social constructions (I10, L37, N10, N16). "Post-modernism is as liable as modernism is to arrogance, dogmatism and a conquering/dominating mentality, when it dismisses out of hand any conversation about an 'underlying reality'" (Larner, 1994, p. 14). "Modernism can restrain us from postmodern follies—concerning ourselves only with surface appearances and abolishing external realities as a constraint on our stories" (Pocock, 1995, p. 159). A reality mediated or constituted primarily through language is context-dependent, malleable and subject to various interpretations (T8, Y6, AC3). Doan (1998) referenced Nichols and Schwartz (1997) when he suggested that postmodernism claims "that there are no realities, only points of view" (p. 381). Postmodernism opposes the idea of a single objective reality (I7). Flaskas (1994) suggests that "a simple recounting of the postmodernist opposition to the idea of a single objective reality" (p. 144) found in family systems literature is the departure point for discussions regarding a new conceptualization of the therapeutic process.

With regard to therapy. Therapy informed by postmodernism recognizes that a person or persons can interpret events and experience from multiple perspectives and, therefore, perceive and respond to multiple realities (D14).

> In moving from a typically modernist first-order to a characteristically post-modern second-order cybernetics explicitly built on the realization that there is no privileged position or neutral vantage point from which to observe or practice, nor an objective

> reality being described by clients or accessible to therapist, family therapy may, at least, have found its voice and come into its own as a uniquely post-modern therapy (Parry, 1991, p. 39).

Postmodern therapists encourage developing multiple 'centers' for understanding various views presented in therapy (T17). "Consistent with a postmodern backdrop, we view the therapist's talk as constructing a sense of mutuality and multple 'centers' for understanding the presented content" (Kogan & Gale, 1997, p. 122). Some systemic therapies have combined the concept of multiple realities with social constructionism which has contributed to a tendency to deny that reality exists apart from one's construction of it (I1).

> I think that in systemic therapy an enthusiasm for this 'postmodernist' embracing of multiple realities has been combined with an enthusiasm for the idea of socially constructed realities—and that this combination has led to a tendency to minimise or even negate an idea of a reality that exists separate to our constructions of it, or indeed separate to our consciousness of it (Flaskas, 1994, p. 143).

Another view suggests that family therapists will not be able to abandon the modern idea of reality (L36). "The deconstructive lesson for post-modernists in family therapy is that we cannot simply abandon modern ideas of truth and reality, just as we cannot shift or move beyond power and cybernetics" (Larner, 1994, p. 14).

Relativism

Four articles with five comments were found that addressed the postmodern emphasis of relativism (K11, K12, L21, O16, T12). Postmodernism holds that points of view and meanings are relative (K12, O16, T12). "From a postmodern stance, all views are relative"

(Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 30). "Postmodernists replace these uncertainties with relativistic encounters in which different points of view are juxtaposed, or rather (following an influential metaphor from Gilligan, 1982), alternative 'voices' are allowed their right to be heard" (Frosh, 1995, p. 177). "A common criticism of postmodernism charges that this view means anything goes and all meanings are relative (Held, 1995)" (Kogan & Gale, 1997, p. 103). Postmodern theories, such as social constructionism, are said to be relativistic (K11). "Postmodernist theories, such as social constructionism, have been criticized as being relativistic, as saying that one opinion is as good as another, or that it is all just a matter of semantics (Minnich, 1990)" (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 32). Relativism, a postmodern characteristics, is said to contribute to a cultural lassitude (L21)."For example, Norris (1992a) refers to postmodernism as a 'widespread cultural malaise' characterized by skepticism, relativism and nihilism" (Larner, 1994, p. 13).

Merges fact and fiction

Two articles and three references considered that feature of postmodernism that merges fact and fiction (L22, L33, M21). The postmodern world merges fact and fiction (L22). "In a post-modern world which merges the fictive and the real, wars (as in the Gulf War) never *really* happen, except as a spectacle on television rewound at the touch of a button" (Larner, 1994, p. 13). One claims that postmodernism is a philosophy that considers fiction, narrative, and text as more real that the real (L33, M21). "From this perspective, post-modernism could appear as an inverted modernism that perpetuates a philosophy of privilege where the fictive, narrative and the text are considered more real that the real" (Larner, 1994,

p. 13). "Thus it is not that the real is illusory (postmodernism) or that the illusory is real (modernism) but somewhere 'in between'" (Larner, 1995, p. 212).

Knowledge

Six articles directed twelve comments to postmodernism's concept of knowledge (E1, K4, K5, K11, K13, K17, L18, N8, N13, N21, W4, AD3).

In general. Ideas about knowledge from either a postmodern or modern perspective are difficult to classify (N13). "There are some ideas about knowledge which defy easy classification into modern or postmodern positions" (Pocock, 1995, p. 157). Knowledge, from a postmodernist perspective, is not something external to the knower, is not an accurate representation of what is 'out there,' is not global, but is an edifying conversation with many voices all of which are informed by different values (E1, K4, K5, K11, K13). "Foucault parallels a postmodern anthropological position, as he does not propose that there are global knowledges that can be universally accepted as truth" (Madigan, 1992, p. 271). Hare-Mustin (1994) described knowledge from a postmodern perspective "as an edifying conversation of varied voices rather than an accurate representation of what is 'out there'" (p. 20). "Postmodernism typically values diversity, plurality, and choice" (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 32). The concept of knowledge is part of the postmodern inquiry which seeks to examine how knowledge is created, privileged, or suppressed (AD3). "Broadly speaking, postmodernism and social constructionism are forms of inquiry devoted to examination of two fundamental concepts, *knowledge* and *language*: what we know or think we might know, the ways in which knowledge is created, the privileging and suppressing of knowledge, and the role of language in these" (Anderson, 1999, p. 2). Knowledge is seen as partial and ambiguous

(K17). "Postmodern thinkers regard knowledge as partial and ambiguous, and they challenge dominant discourse by calling attention to marginalized and subjugated discourses" (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 30). Totalizing knowledges, imbued with power, have the potential of becoming hegemonies or ideologies (L18). "A discourse involves a totalising knowledge or hegemony, it it is imbued with power and turned into ideology (Eagleton, 1991)" (Larner, 1994, p. 12). Postmodernism critiques the modernist assumption that knowledge can be objective (N8, N21). Postmodernism "should make those with claims to knowledge nervous" (Pocock, 1995, p. 169).

With regard to therapy. The aim of a postmodern narrative therapist is to bring forward, illuminate, and amplify the knowledge of the client (W4). "From a postmodern narrative perspective, however, it is the client whose knowledges must be brought forward, illuminated, and amplified" (Weingarten, 1998, p. 4).

Truth

Ten articles which contained nineteen references to the postmodern notion of truth were found in the literature (E1, I5, J2, K15, L16, L36, N16, N22, N24, O3, O29, O32, O48, O59, T14, W9, W18, Y1, Y5).

In general. Postmodernism suspects any claims of objective knowledge or universal truths (E1, J2, N24, T14). "The evolution to postmodernism in contemporary society has invited a conservative backlash about the 'truth'; we see this as an inevitable part of the process of change" (Zimmerman & Dickerson, 1994, p. 243). Postmodernism's "simple messages to us are that no theories can be true, no approaches correct, and that it is permissible to break through some of the conceptual boundaries with which we surround

ourselves" (Pocock, 1995, p. 169). Postmodernism restrains from attempts to capture absolute truth and suggests that getting beyond appearances or underneath the surface to discover a universal truth or singular essence from any phenomenon is not possible (I5, N16, N22, O29, O48, Y5). Postmodernism counters the project of modernism which committed itself to "the process of finding and describing observable reality [that] could ultimately lead to knowledge which was objective and able to be verified—and at this level of the production of knowledge, it could ultimately then lead to a single universal truth with respect to the nature of that part of the physical or social world which was under supervision" (Flaskas, 1994, p. 144). "Postmodernism can restrain us from modern follies—believing in objective knowledge and attempting to capture absolute truth" (Pocock, 1995, p. 159). "As stated by O'Hara and Anderson (1991): 'A society enters the postmodern age when it loses faith in absolute truth—even the attempt to discover absolute truth'" (Doan, 1998, p. 381). For postmodernist, discursive practices are evaluated from the perspective of their ethical and functional aesthetic rather than their truth-value (K15). "Thus for postmodernists, judgments about discoursive practices are based not on their truth-value but on their function and ethical implications" (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 30).

With regard to therapy. The postmodern therapist emphasizes points of view rather than truth-claims (O3, Y1). "Narrative therapy has been associated with the assumptions of postmodernism and social constructionism; both of which support the notion that there are no truths, just points of view" (Doan, 1998, p. 379). "'Postmodern' family therapy is differentiated from modernist approaches by its disavowal of truth claims and its encouragement of alternative 'voices' or narratives" (Frosh, 1995, p. 175). Moreover, these

points of view are seen as fluid and subject to change as opposed to fixed (O32, W9, W18). "One might say, to risk caricaturing some postmodernist family therapists, that when people speak they do not reveal anything 'true' about themselves, they merely construct another intriguing (seductive) story" (Frosh, 1995, p. 182). "For a postmodern narrative therapist, there are no 'true' stories, no fixed 'truths,' no master narratives (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Lax, 1992; Parry & Doan, 1994)" (Weingarten, 1998, p. 4). One view of postmodernism suggests that family therapists will not be able to escape from modern notions of truth (L36). "The deconstructive lesson for post-modernists in family therapy is that we cannot simply abandon modern ideas of truth and reality, just as we cannot shift or move beyond power and cybernetics" (Larner, 1994, p. 14). The postmodern therapist, not unlike a modern therapist, becomes aware of the elusive nature of truth (O59). "I am suggesting that so-called 'postmodern therapies' are not really postmodernist at all, but are, rather, modernist, with a heightened awareness of the slippery nature of 'truth' and of the dangers of abusive uses of power in the service of, for example, sexism and racism" (Frosh, 1995, p. 189).

Lack of epistemological limits

Two articles and three comments were found which focused upon the lack of epistemological limits in postmodernism (A8, D20, D21).

In general. Postmodernism results in the absence of epistemological limits which, in turn, could lead to the lack of ethical limits if a deliberate ethical stance is not adopted (A8). Lowe (1990) said that the postmodern focus upon endless play results in the lack of epistemological limits but not the absence of ethical limits presuming that one adopts an ethical imagination (p. 5). The postmodern author is able to write stories free of constraint

(D20). "Countering the almost religious solemnity with which the great works of modernism were approached, the post-modern author, freed from the constraints of structural considerations as well as any duty to a subterranean truth, plays with the text and with the reader" (Parry, 1991, p. 41).

With regard to therapy. The postmodern therapist, like the postmodern author, invites clients to a realm of narrative possibilities (D21). "In a manner similar to that of the post-modern writer who, released from the metaphysical baggage that weighs down a story, can play with stories because they are only stories, the post-modern therapist can introduce clients to all the things they can do with their story-telling capacities" (Parry, 1991, p. 42).

Lack of essence

Three articles and three references were discovered which addressed postmodernism's denial of essence (C9, O28, T14). Postmodernism denies the existence of essences and rejects the idea that an essence can be derived from any phenomena (C9, O28, T14). "Postmodern therapists do not believe in 'essences'"(Hoffman, 1991, p. 9). "But postmodernist theory takes issue with the entire interpretive endeavour, arguing that is is based on a wish to make connections between things which are not in fact connected—that human experience, to the extent that it can be said to have an 'essence,' is always arbitrary and fragmentary" (Frosh, 1995, p. 181). "Postmodernism critiques reject the idea that a singular meaning or essence can be derived from any phenomenon" (Kogan & Gale, 1997, p. 104).

No transcendent Other

Two articles and two comments directed attention toward the postmodern position concerning a transcendent Other (O14, D15). The postmodern sensibility either opposes the

notion of a transcendent Other or claims there is no consensus regarding a transcendent Other (O14, D15). "It is also a practice [applying norms to people] that must give way before the post-modern experience of a world without any consensus concerning a transcendent Other" (Parry, 1991, p. 40). "In a similar vein, Parry (1991, p. 41) claims that, through its opposition to any notion of a transcendent Other ..." (Frosh, 1995, p. 176).

Regarding the Real

Three articles and four comments reflected a postmodern position regarding the Real (L33, M21, O42, O58). Postmodernism is concerned with those moments with language breaks down and the Real breaks through (O58). " ...postmodernism—despite all its emphasis on language—is concerned with those moments when language breaks down and the Real breaks through" (Frosh, 1995, p. 189). The Real is something that can not be captured by words or narratives (O42). "So too for postmodernists: the 'real' is that which breaks through the curtain of words and narratives to overwhelm us with its disruptive potency" (Frosh, 1995, p. 185). On the other hand, postmodernism considers the Real an illusion and instead privileges fiction, narrative and text (M21, L33). "Thus it is not that the real is illusory (postmodernism) or that the illusory is real (modernism) but somewhere 'in between'" (Larner, 1995, p. 212).

Non-intervention and non-hierarchical positioning

Seven articles containing eleven comments were found that addressed the postmodern feature of non-intervention and non-hierarchical posturing (C10, M14, N6, N19, O55, S6, T1, T3, T21, T22, W7).

In general. Postmodern challenges the hierarchical aspect of modernity because it contributes to oppression (M14). "Postmodernism refuses the certainty and hierarchy of modernity, because it masks the hegemonic practices that lead to injustice, oppression and marginalization in society" (Larner, 1995, p. 206). Furthermore, an emphasis on intervention suggests an 'acting upon' which reflects a hierarchy implicit in the assumption of expertise (T3, T23). "Numerous dialogues in MFT journals compare the merits of instrumental, hierarchical and/or strategic roles to the 'non-interventive' and participatory stance of postmodernism" (Kogan & Gale, 1997, p. 101). "A postmodern intervention attempts to acknowledge and act from a participant status" (Kogan & Gale, 1997, p. 123).

With regard to therapy. A postmodern therapy emphasizes the role of clinician as a nonhierarchical participant (C10, N6, N19, S6, T1, T3, W7) or, at least, creates an awareness of the asymmetries of power in a therapeutic relationships (O55). " ...the idea of reducing the status of the interviewer is also a postmodern one" (Hoffman, 1991, p. 13).

> Postmodern (or narrative) family therapists are critical about modern assumptions that family process may be objectively described, but there is particular unease about psychoanalysis in which there is generally assumed to be a steep hierarchy between therapist and patient in which the former discovers *the truth* and passes it, by way of interpretation, to the latter (Pocock, 1995, p. 153).

A cultural metaphor, which is congruent with postmodern tenets, "views the family and therapist as participants in an exchange whereas the system metaphor views the family as an observer" (Pare, 1996, p. 27). "Postmodern models of therapy stress the participation of the clinician in a nonhierarchical, non-objectifying role, and highlights the therapist's

embeddedness in the same processes of social construction as are the individual and the family" (Kogan & Gale, 1997, p. 101). "The postmodern narrative therapist is committed 'to a side-by-side, not a hierarchical therapeutic relationship ...'" (Weingarten, 1998, p. 4). Another perspective suggests that a therapeutic approach informed by postmodernism cannot be 'non-interventive' (T21). "According to ethnomethodological theory, postmodern therapy is not and cannot be 'non-interventive' or without an agenda (a claim not made by the therapist)" (Kogan & Gale, 1997, p. 123). On the other hand, it may be useful to talk about therapeutic practices as possessing a 'decentering agenda' (T22). " ... a postmodern therapy may differ from other models in its decentering agenda, rather than a 'non-interventive' position" (Kogan & Gale, 1997, p. 123).

Non-elitist

One article contained a comment that reflected a feature of postmodernism that denied any basis for elitist claims found in any specific discipline (D11). "In a post-modern world, any basis for a claim on the part of any elite, whether religious, scientific, political, or social, begins to disappear" (Parry, 1991, p. 38).

Rejects ideology of observed/observer

Four articles possessed seven references to the postmodern position regarding the ideology of the observed and the observer (C11, O34, O36, O37, O39, S6, W5).

In general. Postmodernism suggests that it is not possible to achieve the distance necessary to render a completely objective and universal description of a social phenomena (C11, O34, O36, O37, O39, S6). Postmodern ethnography "rejects the ideology of 'observer-observed,' there being nothing observed and no one who is observer" (Clifford & Marcus as

cited in Hoffman, 1991, pp. 15-16). "Postmodernism, however, claims something different: it suggests that distance from the object is no longer possible, that the traditional subject-object (subjectivity/objectivity) divide no longer exists" (Frosh, 1995, p. 183). Congruent with postmodern assumptions, "the cultural metaphor views the family and therapist as participants in an exchange whereas the system metaphor views the family as an observer" (Pare, 1996, p. 26).

With regard to therapy. Postmodern therapy views the therapist and the clients as participants as opposed to observer and observed (W5). "These dilemmas [therapist as observer, and dimensions of power] shrink, although I do not believe that they disappear even when working from a postmodern narrative perspective" (Weingarten, 1998, p.4).

Self-reflexivity

Three articles contained four references to the postmodern emphasis upon self-reflexivity (D4, Q7, AD11, AD18).

In general. Self-reflexivity is said to be a major characteristic of postmodernism particularly vis-à-vis attempts to define it (D4). "At times it seems as though attempts to define it is one of its major characteristics, perhaps in keeping with a certain reflexiveness in many of the major works of postmodernism" (Parry, 1991, p. 38).

With regard to therapy. Postmodernism has encouraged greater reflexivity of traditional beliefs including those informing both the theory and practice of therapy (Q7, AD11, AD18). "The post-modernist/social constructionist perspective has encouraged a self-reflexive stance for the development of our approaches (Lax, 1993; Hoffman, 1993) enabling us to take a more evaluative stance on our thinking and practice" (Hart, 195, p. 185). "A

postmodern—social construction perspective invites self-reflection on our traditional beliefs, including those on the family in family therapy" (Anderson, 1999, p. 7).

Self

Six articles possessed ten comments directed toward to the notion of self (L3, L23, L26, L39, N18, O49, S8, S10, T10, AE6).

In general. The postmodern self is one that is multiple, ever-changing, decentered, and continuously being revised (L23, L26, S8, S10, T10). "For Giddens (1991), the post-modern idea of self as 'continuously revised biographical narratives' (page 5), that currently informs the social sciences, constitutes a late-modern desire for mastery and control of time and nature" (Larner, 1994, p. 13). "Howe (1992) notes the glee of post-modernists in celebrating the death of the modern idea of self" (Larner, 1994, p. 13). From a postmodern perspective, "individuals are characterized in terms of multiple selves" (Gergen as cited in Pare, 1996, p. 28). "Postmodern thinkers posit a 'decentered' or a dialogical self (Bakhtin, 1986; Day & Tappan, 1996, Gergen, 1991)" (Kogan & Gale, 11997, p. 103). Another view suggests that the notion of relational selves has not eliminated the idea of a singular, coherent self or an "I" (AE6). "I thank Carlos Sluzki for reminding us, with his paraphrasing of Proust, that continuity exists, that there is an 'I' as well as relational selves, and that there is continuity between modernity and postmodernity" (Minuchen, 1999, p. 14). Yet another view of postmodernism precludes a fuller or more developed self (O49). "But the promises of a better narrative, a more constructive way of being, or a fuller and more developed self are not available under postmodern conditions" (Frosh, 1995, p. 187).

With regard to therapy. The postmodern therapist views the self as a social construction, endlessly transmutable and available for deconstruction (L3, L39). "Other dualities in post-modern family therapy can be similarly deconstructed, for example, whether the self is a unitary essence or a socially constructed narrative" (Larner, 1994, p. 11). "For example, take the post-modern idea in family therapy of the self as a socially constructed narrative: 'Now in the post-modern era, the self ceases to be fundamentally coherent and instead becomes an endlessly transmutable social construction' (O'Hara, 1991, page 73)" (Larner, 1994, p. 14). Postmodernism, in conjunction with modernism, could provide for a wide range of therapeutic curiosity since self and system are not separated (N18). "Refusing to separate self from system and modernism from postmodernism may allow therapeutic curosity a very wide range indeed" (Pocock, 1995, p. 161).

Emphasis on client ability and creativity

Two articles possessed three comments suggesting client ability and creativity are postmodern features (S2, W4, W7). Postmodern approaches to therapy look for motivation to change within the client (S2). "Postmodern approaches to therapy "depict the creative subjectivity of clients—their ability to reconstrue their worlds in accordance with their values and aspirations—as the central impetus of change" (Pare, 1996, p. 21). A postmodern narrative therapist participates in a non-hierarchical relationship that stresses the knowledge and ability of the client to find solutions (W4, W7). "From a postmodern narrative perspective, however, it is the client whose knowledges must be brought forward, illuminated, and amplified" (Weingarten, 1998, p. 4).

Techniques

Three articles contained six references to techniques and postmodernism (T1, T23, V8, W7, W15, W16). Postmodern therapy does not view conversational practices as techniques nor does a postmodern therapist employ techniques since that would imply a therapist who is *doing something to* the clients (T23). Kogan and Gale (1997) point out that "it is important not to view these [conversational] practices as techniques for 'doing' postmodern therapy" (p. 123). A postmodern therapist acts as a participant in the conversation (T1, W7). Models of postmodern therapy "stress the participation of the clinician in nonhierarchical, non-objectifying role ..." (Kogan & Gale, 1997, p. 101). The postmodern narrative therapist is committed "to a side-by-side, not a hierarchical therapeutic relationship ..." (Weingarten, 1998, p. 4). On the other hand, Smith (1998) said that "having the family be responsible for initiating the direction of therapy" (p. 157) is a postmodern technique (V8). Similarly the practice of radical listening is a postmodern technique that can be taught (W15, W16). "The practices that produce 'radical listening' are consistent with a postmodern narrative perspective" (Weingarten, 1998, p. 4). "These practices can be taught" (Weingarten, 1998, p. 5).

Concerns of postmodernism

Twelve articles possessed a total of thirty-four comments highlighting concerns regarding postmodernism's impact on the theory and practice of therapy (A7, A8, I1, I13, L24, L31, L32, L36, M3, M9, M22, N4, N10, N11, N16, N23, O6, O9, O10, O11, O19, O22, O49, O60, Q7, R1, R2, R3, T6, T12, X11, Y13, Z2, Z5).

Concerns raised by the introduction of postmodernism in family therapy include its lack of epistemological limits (A8), its focus upon surface appearances (N16), and its potential to encourage an 'anything goes' attitude (T12). Lowe (1990) suggested that the postmodern emphasis on endless play results in the absence of epistemological limits (p. 5). "Modernism can restrain us from postmodern follies—concerning ourselves only with surface appearances and abolishing external realities as a constraint on our stories" (Pocock, 1995, p. 159). "A common criticism of postmodernism charges that this view means anything goes and all meanings are relative (Held, 1995)" (Kogan & Gale, 1997, p. 102). There is the issue that a postmodern social or political regime precludes moral and existential questions (L24) followed by the claim that therapy can not abandon modern notions of truth and reality (L36). The postmodern philosophy "contributes to a fragmentation of personal identity and a post-modern political-social regime devoid of the deeper moral questions of life and existence" (Larner, 1994, p. 13). "The deconstructive lesson for post-modernist in family therapy is that we cannot simply abandon modern ideas of truth and reality, just as we cannot shift or move beyond power and cybernetics" (Larner, 1994, p. 14). One view holds that an improved self simply is not possible under postmodern conditions (O49). "But the promises of a better narrative, a more constructive way of being, or a fuller and more developed self are not available under postmodern conditions" (Frosh, 1995, p. 187). Also of concern is a stance that suggests external realities do not exist apart from their social constructions (I1, N10). Enthusiasm for multiple realities has been combined with enthusiasm for socially constructed realities to create "a tendency to minimise or even negate an idea of a reality that exists separate to our constructions of it, or indeed separate to our consciousness of it" (Flaskas,

1994, p. 143). "While much of this postmodern thinking seems useful, it also appears excessive when one explores the implications of postmodern assumptions about external reality" (Pocock, 1995, p. 156).

There is a concern that therapists have uncritically accepted postmodernism while not having been attuned to the diversity positions found within (N11, O9). "There have been a number of voices within family therapy warning against uncritical acceptance of this range of postmodern ideas (Golann, 1988; Birch, 1991; Minuchen, 1991; Goldner, 1991; Frosh, 1991a; Speed, 1984; Luepnitx, 1992) as well as some other attempts to integrate first- and second-order approaches (Atkinson & Heath, 1990; Simon, 1992)" (Pocock, 195, p. 157). "In addition, the diversity of positions which can or have been characterized as 'postmodernist' is very great, and psychotherapists have not necessarily been attuned to this in their own selection of apparently postmodern perspectives" (Frosh, 1995, p. 175). As a consequence, the selective appropriation by therapists of certain features of postmodernism becomes problematic particularly when other features are simply ignored because they do not fit (O10, O11, X11). "One consequence of this selective attention is that psychotherapists have seized upon some aspects of postmodernist thought apparently amenable to therapeutic applications, but potentially more challenging or contradictory elements have be ignored or edited out" (Frosh, 1995, p. 175). "It [the path taken by these authors] winds around and through some parts of postmodernism, while other parts are avoided" (Miller & de Shazer, 1998, p. 371). One view holds that a postmodern posture places it in opposition to the therapeutic enterprise (O19, O22). "Following this argument concerning therapy, I will suggest that postmodernism has in any case a different trajectory from the democratizing of voice, a trajectory of

disavowal of language that places it in opposition to the psychotherapeutic enterprise as a whole" (Frosh, 1995, p. 177). There is also speculation that the embrace of postmodern features may have more to do with therapists following fashion than commitment to an established domain of knowlede (O60). "Rather, the attempt of therapists to claim postmodernist status may represent a failure in our ability to stay with what we know" (Frosh, 1995, p. 189).

There is also the concern that therapy may become unsettled and lose itself in postmodernism's labyrinth of mirrors, irrationality, and the absence of absolutes (A7, I13, N23, O6). "'Postmodern' family therapy may also be in danger of being given over to the parodic imagination, lost in a labyrinth of mirrors, reflecting nothing but its own reflections" (Lowe, 1990, p. 5). Flaskas (1994) hopes "that if we approach 'postmodernism' conditionally, it may be possible to have the benefits of a postmodernist awareness while keeping our feet firmly planted in the territory of therapy, with all its complexities of human experience which are given full legitimacy in guiding us through the 'ism' maze" (p. 146). "But [postmodernism] should not require us to dump what we have agreed to call knowledge wholesale or to abandon the *attempt* to understand the complex phenomena of families and family therapy" (Pocock, 1995, p. 169). Another view is critical of a laissez faire environment promoted by postmodernism that precludes clinicians from discussing failure in therapy (R1, Y13). "A third reason why a discussion of failure is seen so rarely in the family therapy literature may be that it has become increasingly difficult to discuss within a postmodern framework" (Spellman & Harper, 1996, p. 208). "The postmodern world is one that lacks a legitimate yardstick against which to measures one's own and other's therapeutic styles and

practices" (Doan, 1998, p. 384). This environment renders the idea of failure ambiguous (R2) and creates the impression that in therapy, like jazz, "there are no bum notes" (R3). "In some ways postmodernism allows therapists to continue their trend of avoidance by rendering the notion of 'failure' ambiguous" (Spellman & Harper, 1996, p. 208). "Therapy with a postmodern frame is like jazz: there are no bum notes" (Spellman & Harper, 1996, p. 208). On the other hand, there is the view that postmodernism has allowed us to be more evaluative of our thinking and practices (Q7). "The postmodernist/social constructionist perspective has encouraged a self-reflexive stance for the development of our approaches (Lax, 1993; Hoffman, 1993) enabling us to take a more evaluative stance on our thinking and practice" (Hart, 1995, p. 185). There is also the concern that a postmodern perspective could create the context that would permit a therapist to act upon a personal ideology of control and influence (M9). " ... conceivably a postmodern narrative therapist could manifest a personal ideology of control and desire to influence" (Larner, 1995, p. 198).

Others suggest that there is no benefit in insisting upon the postmodern/modern dichotomy (M22, N4) and in the instance where it is insisted upon, it appears self-contradictory (L31). "There is little to gain from family therapists dividing into modernist/postmodernist/*post* postmodernist camps on the issue of power" (Larner, 1995, p. 213). "In the first section of the paper, in contrast to Hoffman, I resist division of family therapy into modern (Part 1) and postmodern (Part2) by (a) some exploration of these two parts in which I suggest that they are probably untenable as discrete positions ..." (Pocock, 195, p. 151). " ... the postmodern claim, 'There are no Grand Narratives' looks self-contradictory" (Larner, 1994, p. 13). Afterall, if the aim of postmodernism is to overthrow

modernism, it becomes the very thing it opposes—another hegemony (L32). "Taken too seriously, a post-modern family therapy could unwittingly perpetuate the hegemony of *theory* in another guise, where post-modernist becomes another grand story to believe in after the purging of the old modernist tale" (Larner, 1994, p. 13). Another critique of therapies informed by postmodernism is identifying how these therapies accomplish egalitarian roles, non-objectifying interventions, or social critiques (T6). "How egalitarian roles, non-objectifying interventions, and/or social critiques are accomplished in postmodern therapy remains unclear" (Kogan & Gale, 1997, p. 102). One critic has suggested that postmodernism has been responsible for family therapy losing its focus upon the family (Z2, Z5); that postmodernism has encouraged all authority, expertise and power to be viewed as suspect (AE5); and has focused attention away from assisting families to peripheral epistemological explorations or political issues (AE8). "This made me wonder whether the postmodernist ideas that seem so prevalent in the literature of the field had anything to do with the disappearance of the family from the therapeutic process" (Minuchen, 1998, p. 397). "It seems that, in the view of some postmodern clinicians, all organized authority is questionable, all expertise is power, and the use of power is always for increasing power" (Minuchen, 1999, p. 13). "The purpose of these [family therapy] interventions is not related to the exploration of significant epistemological and political issues but to the alleviation of stress or pain in the client family" (Minuchen, 1999, p. 14).

Discussion

The effort of this inquiry yielded what many may have suspected—that the term postmodernism is understood in many ways. It has been used to describe the world, cultures,

movements, trends, perspectives, sensibilities, stances, theories, and therapies. Beyond its descriptive qualities, postmodernism is used prescriptively. Postmodernism is said to urge, oppose, inquire, critique, resist, liberate, deconstruct, celebrate and exhort, to name a few. Moreover, there are postmodern positions regarding such concepts as knowledge, reality, objectivity, truth, meaning and power. While the breadth of postmodernism contributes to its ambiguity, instances of general agreement can be found. Areas of disagreement appear to revolve more around the utility of postmodern ideas or its political agenda in therapy than what counts as a postmodern characteristic.

Postmodern as a descriptor of the world

One emphasis of postmodernism describes a world characterized by fragmentation, plurality, and diversity. It is a world where people, having recognized that they have been oppressed or marginalized, are finding their collective voice and speaking out against oppression. Increased attention is being focused upon social and cultural discourses which form the context in which people's lives are oriented and personal meaning constructed. Often these discourses are imbued with assumptions that are taken-for-granted as a consequence of individuals being born, and subsequently indoctrinated, into a specific context. Social and cultural discourses may refer to such grand narratives as science and progress or to practices particular to a geographical region or to discourses located in specialized knowledges such as therapy. Ambivalence surrounds postmodern theories which are seen, at times, as useful towards resisting the homogenization of the world or as contributing to cultural cynicism and nihilism.

Postmodernism vis-à-vis modernism

Although there is general agreement that postmodernism is different from modernism, there is no certainty regarding how it is different. Where some authors describe postmodernism as being opposed to modernism, others suggests that it is a movement beyond modernist assumptions. This distinction can be important in the measure that *'is opposed to'* creates a polemic where *'a movement beyond'* describes a transition. Larner (1994) suggested that the binary thought characteristic of Western culture encourages a framing of the postmodern/modern discussion in polarizing terms. Yet, at the same time, Larner (1994) says that it is this type of binary thought that some postmodernists, like Derrida, seek to move past. The assumption is that binary thought, while useful particularly in science and technology, does not lend itself to capturing and understanding the richness and diversity of human interactions.

Versions of postmodernism

When the effort is made, most authors distinguish between versions of postmodernism by referring to an individual whose work represents a particular understanding. For instance, Hoffman references Foucault, Frosh cites Zizek, Larner utilizes Derrida, etc.. This is, of course, quite useful since it draws attention to those unique postmodern features emphasized by a representative which, in turn, informs how that version ought to be understood in subsequent applications. Another practice, however, is to simply use the term 'postmodernism' with little, if any, clarification regarding the understanding of the word. Consider, for example, Zimmerman and Dickerson (1993), whose only use of the word 'postmodern' appeared in the abstract when they said, "Using ideas from postmodern thought,

a process of therapy is described ..." (p. 403). No other references, however, were made to postmodernism which rendered its meaning ambiguous.

In light of the breathe of postmodern concepts, contributors to family therapy journals would reduce ambiguity by referencing the specific postmodern idea or characteristic he or she is utilizing or the representative from whom it is derived. Furthermore, in those instances where the postmodern concept borrows from another discipline, the family therapy field would be served by knowing which discipline the concept is taken. For example, it would be reasonable to presume that the encouragement and celebration of pastiche in postmodern art will have different consequences if encouraged and celebrated as a postmodern approach to therapy. Indeed, it would appear that this lack of definition, that is, invoking a postmodern thought as having some relevance in therapy without adequate clarification regarding the specific feature creates an instance where the reader may draw upon an understanding which may or may not bear resemblance to the author's.

Postmodernism as a current trend in family therapy

There are many references describing postmodernism as a current trend in family therapy. On the other hand, there is no agreement regarding the quality of that trend. Where some authors simply describe the trend in a dispassionate voice, others are encouraging, and still others are skeptical. Where some view the trend as a means to reduce the hierarchy between client and therapist, others suspect it may be seeking to establish itself as a hegemony.

Postmodern concepts

Objectivity

There appears to be a general consensus that postmodernism denies a objective rendering of reality. However, the argument against objectivity may proceed from different starting points. One view suggests that the vantage point does not exist where a absolute and objective perspective is granted to an observer. Another suggests that realities are mediated by language, a social construction, which then problematizes objectivity. A consequence of this position for therapists utilizing postmodern thought is the selection of metaphors that avoid objectivist language.

Arbitrariness, uncertainty, and fragmentation

One version of postmodernism (see Frosh, 1995) claims that language will never be able to sufficiently describe the arbitrariness, uncertainty, and fragmentation that are always a part of people's lives. In his view, a postmodern therapist would abandon the search for truth and coherence. Frosh's view of postmodernism is distinguished by its deliberate encouragement and celebration of uncertainty and fragmentation sans any effort to the contrary—the construction of meaning. Although other authors question the usefulness of therapies informed by postmodernism, Frosh presents an understanding that renders postmodernism antithetical to therapy particularly if therapy is seen as a meaning-making activity.

The description of postmodernism which celebrates arbitrariness, uncertainty or irrationality may have lead critics to view the postmodern therapist as encouraging arbitrariness or irrationalism in the therapeutic process. Yet, this researcher has not located

any instances in the professional family therapy literature where a representative of postmodernism has advocated a therapeutic experience characterized by fragmentation, uncertainty, or arbitrariness. It would seen then, that critics may be responding to an understanding or version of postmodernism much different than those who see its utility.

Language, discourse, narrative or story

Postmodernism emphasizes the metaphor of language, discourse, narrative or story as a way of describing and understanding human experience. Language is seen as a social construction which creates, organizes, and maintains social realities through the continuous interaction of people. Narratives are the means individuals and groups use to construct and communicate meanings. Social meanings emerge from a relational contexts which rely upon language.

Emancipation

Common among the concepts attributed to postmodernism is the idea that postmodernism challenges social and cultural discourses that are seen as unjust or oppressive. Postmodernists claim that social and cultural practices have the potential of being restrictive or exploitative for those individuals whose thoughts or behaviors fall outside the range of acceptable, normal or healthy as described or implied by a particular discourse. Postmodernism encourages the examination of the assumptions of a discourse, which may be difficult because often they become "so familiar, they are taken for granted and even recede from view" (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 20). Without self-reflection, an individual, i.e., a therapist or another person in an position of influence, runs the risk of unconsciously perpetuating a dominate social or cultural practice without awareness of the consequences to other people.

With that awareness in mind, postmodernism will resist claims of an elitist nature, not because the claim lacks coherence, but because of the presumption to impose and subsequently marginalize. Within the realm of therapy, for example, feminists have challenged both the language in therapy which, they claim, is biased against women as well as the field of mental health for its colonial mentality (Hoffman, 1991). With the awareness of the potential to exert power and influence, a postmodern therapy seeks to minimize the hierarchical relationship between client and therapist in an effort to avoid oppressing or marginalizing the client narrative. Toward that position, conversational relationships are encouraged where multiple points of view are considered and once quiet voices are heard.

Endless and inventive play

Two perspectives regarding the endless play and inventiveness of stories are found in the literature. A more common view is that postmodernism views stories as something which can be endlessly played with and treated with limitless inventiveness. A less common perspective suggests that the postmodern position does not encourage endless play but simply asserts that words will unavoidably be a source of misunderstanding.

Deconstruction and decentering

The words deconstruction or decentering can be found in several articles with little similarity regarding the word's import. Where one view suggests that postmodernism deconstructs reason, another claims that family therapy has misunderstood Derrida's notion of deconstructionism, and yet another speaks of decentering social narratives in therapy.

Reality

The postmodern concept of reality receives moderate attention in the literature. Frequently, however, types of realities are not distinguished. An exception is Flaskas (1994) who makes it a point in her article to differentiate between physical, social and emotional realities. Moreover, Flaskas draws attention to two positions regarding extralinguistic realities. One position provides for the existence of realities apart from an awareness of it, whereas the other denies it. Also, Flaskas describes two positions regarding reality and social constructionism. One understanding views all realities as social constructions as a consequence of being brought into conscious awareness through language. Another view seeks to describe the relationship between realities and social constructions by saying that realities are mediated by language. This second position does not preclude the existence of extralinguistic realities, rather it stops short of implying that since language is a social construction, all realities, which find expression in language, are therefore social constructions.

Knowledge

Knowledge, from a postmodern perspective is located in social interaction rather than as something apart from the knower or as something that mirrors an external reality. Knowledge is considered to be partial and ambiguous, and its study, epistemology, is thought to have no limits. Postmodernism suspects claims of universal truth and avoids efforts aimed at peering beneath the surface or beyond appearances to discover a Truth or singular essence. On the other hand, looking past the overt practices of a cultural discourse to its assumptions is a postmodern activity. It seems that the effort of looking beneath the surface is not necessarily

avoided except when motivated by the desire to discover and claim discovery of a universal principle or essence. Postmodernism denies the existence of essences or the idea that essences can be derived from any phenomena. Likewise, postmodernism claims no consensus exists with regard to a transcendent Other.

Non-hierarchical

Postmodernism sees social injustice and the marginalization of people in part as a consequence of the hierarchy of modernity and therefore challenges those hierarchies that oppress. With that principle in mind, postmodernism does not recognize any basis for elitist claims found in any discipline, not necessarily because the claim lacks coherence but because of the potential to marginalize.

Non-dualistic

Postmodernism challenges modern dualistic categories like observer/observed or fact/fiction and prefers, instead, descriptions and explanations that move beyond dichotomies. The fluidity and diversity in contemporary society informs that feature of postmodernism which views the self as a social construction open to some measure of revision. Movement toward revision would be motivated by a desire to reconstrue the world in a way that is congruent with a person's own values and aspirations.

Categories of use

This inquiry also revealed that postmodern ideas and characteristics may be used descriptively, prescriptively, and proscriptively. When used descriptively, and in general, postmodernism describes a world increasingly aware of its own diversity. In may also refer to an awareness of other taken-for-granted cultural discourses and social practices that possess

the potential to exclude and marginalize persons. Postmodernism may also point to an awareness that the hope of social utopias through the application of science and reason, like the Enlightenment Project, have not been realized. When used descriptively, and with regard to therapy, postmodernism may describe therapeutic approaches where plurality and diversity receive greater emphasis than dogma and Truth. Postmodernism is described as a movement beyond assumptions characteristic in modernism thought such as knowledge as objective and reality as knowable.

When used prescriptively, and in general, postmodernism exhorts a transition past modernist assumptions, encourages the dismantling of language claims, and seeks emancipation from social or cultural practices that are unjust and oppressive. When used prescriptively, and with regard to therapy, postmodernism encourages a therapeutic stance that is non-heirarchical, non-objectifying and participatory. A therapist operating from a position informed by postmodernism emphasizes polyvocality and multiple points of view which anticipates the potential for contradiction, disparity and conflict.

When used proscriptively, and in general, postmodernism discourages looking at language as a means of embracing experience because language is insufficient to the task. Postmodernism may also be viewed as a celebration of irrationally, uncertainty or arbitrariness which problematizes its use in any endeavor other than to deconstruct. Postmodernism is used proscriptively also when its absence of epistemological limits are seen as a threat to matters of ethics. When used proscriptively, and with regard to therapy, postmodernism's view of word as inadequate to capture human experience render it a perspective at odds with any meaning-making event, including therapy.

Criticism of postmodernism

Criticism and contraversy has accompanied postmodernism since it was first introduced in family therapy literature and continues to do so. It may be suspected that this controversy will prevent the field of family therapy from embracing a language-based metaphor in the same manner in which it embraced the cybernetic/systemic metaphor (Paré, 1996, p. 38). Among the criticisms of postmodernism include: its lack of epistemological limits; its emphasis upon surface events; its absence of moral foundations and; its abandonment of modern notions of truth and reality. Among the criticism of embracing postmodernism as a thought to inform therapy include: a lack of distinction between versions of postmodernism by authors who reference its usefulness and economy; the selection of features of postmodernism which seem to support a clinical practice which simultaneously ignores and leaves unexplained unsupported postmodern features; the lack of attention to a version of postmodernism that, if applied to therapy, could permit a therapist to practice out of an ideology of personal control and influence and; a lack of research describing how an approach to therapy informed by postmodernism achieves its intended purpose. Additional issues focus upon what appears to be an inherent contradiction of postmodernism's effort to eliminate hierarchy by seeming to aspire to dominance; the postmodern environment that silences discussion of therapeutic failure; and the perception that postmodernism removes the family from family therapy.

Conclusion

It would appear that the boon to family therapy provided by postmodernism is the breathe and richness of observations as a consequence of turning a critical eye toward taken-

for-granted assumptions found in social and cultural discourses. And yet, is also appears that the bane of family therapy provided by postmodernism is the breathe and richness of observations as a consequence of turning a critical eye toward taken-for-granted assumptions found in social and cultural discourses.

It is the suggestion of this researcher that if the utilization of postmodern thought or the application of a feature or features of postmodernism is to secure a purchase within the field of therapy, greater effort will have to be expended to qualify how it is to be understood in specific instances. It would appear that the most obvious place to encourage this attention to detail is with the authors who make reference to ideas of postmodernism in their work. Of course, this presumes that the author utilizing a specific postmodern idea or characteristic has knowledge of alternative understandings. Otherwise, as would be expected, that author will risk writing as if the readers all share the same understanding which, in turn, creates the potential for misunderstanding and dissonance when the author's understanding fails to acknowledge the breathe of postmodern ideas. By qualifying one's understanding, an author not only furthers his or her thought by anticipating potential confusion but also makes distinctions that will allow other researchers and practitioners the opportunity to build upon carefully delineated ideas rather than having to begin with clarifications.

Other individuals to whom the field can look for assistance in introducing greater clarity with regard to the understanding of postmodernism are the editors and reviewers of those journals that are publishing articles possessing claims to postmodern ideas. An encouragement towards greater clarification of word use and the discouragement of broad interpretations will serve the field. Of course, this view presumes three things. First, it

presumes that editors are concerned about the breadth and ambivalence surrounding the use of postmodern notions. Second, it presumes an awareness of the multitude ideas constituting the 'postmodern.' Third, it presumes that those who are writing about postmodern ideas are actually writing about postmodern ideas rather than writing in the style of postmodern deconstructionism. One can presume that an author seeking to accomplish the latter will deliberately introduce confusion with the intention of subverting an established position.

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CHAPTER 3. HARLENE ANDERSON, KENNETH GERGEN AND MICHAEL MAHONEY ADDRESS ISSUES RELATED TO POSTMODERNISM

A paper to be submitted to the *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*
Jeffrey Joseph Crane

ABSTRACT

Postmodernism has frequently been criticized for promoting an attitude of 'anything goes.' This article seeks to address that criticism by asking three notable contributors, Harlene Anderson, Kenneth Gergen, and Michael Mahoney to respond to this criticism. In addition, the respondents were also asked to define postmodernism, distinguish it from related concepts, and speculate why criticism of postmodernism continues.

This article seeks to address concern and criticism raised by the introduction of postmodern thought into the theories that inform approaches to therapy by asking notable contributors in the field of therapy and whose work demonstrates an affinity to postmodern ideas to respond to questions. In addition to seeking responses from these contributors regarding published criticism, questions are also asked that attempt to distinguish between postmodernism and related concepts as well as specific postmodern characteristics utilized in the work of these contributors.

Among the criticism is the notion that postmodernism contributes to a laissez faire attitude that 'anything goes.' For instance, the postmodern stance that all views are relative (Hare-Mustin, 1994; Frosh, 1995, Doan, 1998) has lead some critics to conclude that this stance must mean "that it doesn't matter what people do, only what story they tell about it" (Pittman, 1992, p. 58). Others, like Mascolo and Dalto (1995) are uncomfortable with a

doctrine that implies "all versions of the world are equally valid" (p. 187). A practical risk of postmodernism's emphasis on language is the possibility of "reducing patterns of behavior like physical abuse and incest to nothing more than the subjective and equivalent 'stories' of the participants" (Doherty, 1991, p. 42). Smith (1994) said that adopting the version of postmodernism promoted by Gergen, which is one of radical relativism, would leave people "berift of anchors to stabilize a view of self and world" (p. 408). Is it possible for people to live without anchors? Mascolo and Dalto (1995) suggested that those critical of postmodernism say "that without appeal to some external standard (e.g., truth, rationality, or objectivity) or to a shared value system, efforts to persuade others ultimately fail, resulting in gridlock or violence among factions" (p. 189). The critic of postmodernism might also ask, 'If not an external standard, then what?'

Moreover, these are not the only concerns. Doherty et al. (1993, p.19) fear that postmodernism's 'anything goes' posture may undermine the scholarly integrity of traditional family studies. Others suggest that the postmodern position could provide the theoretical departure point for a clinician or supervisor "to use any construction of reality, so long as it makes the family change or feel better" (Nichols & Schwartz as cited in Anderson, et al., 1995). Doherty (1991) expressed concern that clients and families may suffer because practitioners are indulging the field's fashionable intellectual whims by embracing postmodernism's patchwork of discordant styles and theories. This, of course, presumes that the practitioner has managed to navigate postmodernism's murky waters and impenetrable fog of abstraction (Neimeyer, 1997).

An additional problematic, to complicate the matter of addressing the above concerns and criticisms, is found in the ambiguity of the meaning of the word 'postmodernism' (Parry, 1991; Miller & de Shazer, 1998; Best & Kellner, 1991; Sarup, 1988; Pocock, 1995; Doherty, 1991; Frosh, 1995; Mascolo & Dalto, 1995). Even in family therapy literature, the range of postmodernism's usefulness has been described from possessing "considerable utility for clinical practice" (Pare, 1996, p. 29) to a project that is "fundamentally at odds" (Frosh, 1995, p. 146) with therapy. Of course, confusion is not limited to what constitutes the 'postmodern,' but extends to the concepts of constructionism and constructivism particularly in those instances where they are used interchangeably (Doan, 1997, p. 130). "As the postmodern age brings in more clients who are lost within mazes of meaning, the therapist sits across the room struggling with the same dilemma" (Doan, 1997, p. 128).

While there is controversy regarding the potential risks of postmodernism, it appears to be largely confined to the level of theory. Although theoretical concern has been raised, the journals, magazines, newsletters have not reported any unethical or other untoward behavior of a therapist or client as a consequence of any practical application of a postmodern therapeutic orientation. So perhaps another way of asking the same question is, "What constrains a postmodernist approach to therapy?" For instance, if the postmodern stance favors the nonobjectivist, nonfoundational, and perspectival (Kogan & Gale, 1997), what prevents a therapist or client going to an extreme? If the postmodern therapist operates from a position that precludes appeal to an ultimate moral authority (Doherty, 1991, p. 41), how does a therapist take a position with regard to moral behavior? If family therapy "has been overtaken by the vogue of postmodernism" (Fish, 1993, p. 222), which "easily slips into a far

too passive 'anything goes' attitude" (Ward, 1997, p. 169), would not a consequence be the proliferation of radical, possibly amoral, family therapies? Perhaps. On the other hand, maybe Efran, et al., (1988) possessed some early insight regarding the potential of embracing a theoretical stance that could encourage over the top therapies when he said "we do not live alone" (p. 216).

So how does one address the concern that postmodernism may promote an attitude of 'anything goes?' Is there a perch where a curious mind can stand that permits a consideration of the risks and benefits of versions of postmodernism and postmodern emphases that find expression in the theory and practice of therapy? Neimeyer (1997) suggested that meaningful dialogue among those voicing an opinion begins with "critical scholarship that seeks to articulate the points of convergence and divergence" (p. 57) with regard to varieties of postmodernism. Neimeyer (1997) also suggested that this will not likely be an easy task with many divisions and subgroups of theorists and practitioners still in the process of describing themselves in relation to postmodernism and its various features. On the other hand, it seems a reasonable point of departure to begin by seeking greater clarification from those who are recognized in the field of therapy and who have published comments specifically relating to postmodernism.

As mentioned previously, the three individual contributing responses to published criticism and offering comments aimed at distinguishing between postmodernism and related concepts are Harlene Anderson, Kenneth Gergen, and Michael Mahoney. A general trajectory of the work of each will follow as an introduction to the method and results of this inquiry.

Harlene Anderson and Collaborative Language Systems

Harlene Anderson is a founder and faculty member of the Houston Galveston Institute in Texas as well as the Taos Institute. She recently authored *Conversation, language, and possibilities: A postmodern approach to therapy* (1997). Anderson is a coeditor of the *Journal of Systemic Therapies* and on the editorial boards of *Family Process*, *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, and *The Journal of Systemic Consultation and Management*.

Anderson (1997) suggests that postmodernism, rather than being understood as a period of time defined by historical dates, refers to a critique of modernism. Postmodernism represents "a broad challenge to and a cultural shift away from fixed metanarratives, privileged discourses, and universal truths; away from objective reality; away from language as representational; and away from the scientific criterion of knowledge as objective and fixed" (Anderson, 1997, p. 36). Postmodernism related to therapeutic approaches emphasize a focus upon "person(s)-in-relationship" (Anderson, 1997, p. 28) rather than a particular social unit like the family or couple.

Collaborative systems, which seeks to operate from a position informed by postmodernism, urges a shift away from modernist universalizing which insists upon "thinking about human systems and problems in terms of individual, family, and group typologies or nosological categories" (Anderson, 1997, p. 76). Collaborative language systems emphasizes the "power of language, dialogue, and the social construction of meaning" (Goolishian, 1990, p. 45). Collaborative systems favors "the actual dialogue that takes place in the ordinary situations of daily conversation rather than emphasizing the universal, and other broad, community understanding" (Goolishian & Anderson, 1990, p. 107).

Theoretical assumptions of collaborative systems

The philosophical assumptions, described by Anderson (1997), upon which the collaborative approach is based include the following:

1. Human systems are language- and meaning generating systems.
2. Their construction of reality is forms of social action rather than independent individual mental processes.
3. An individual mind is a social composition, and self, therefore, becomes a social relational composition.
4. The reality and meaning that we attribute to ourselves and others and to the experiences and events of our lives are interactional phenomena created and experienced by individuals in conversation and action (through language) with one another and with themselves.
5. Language is generative, gives order and meaning to our lives and our world, and functions as a form of social participation.
6. Knowledge is relational and is embodied and generated in language and our everyday practices. (p. 3)

Hermeneutics and social constructionism

Anderson (1997) says that part of the history of collaborative systems can be traced to the Galveston group's interest in evolutionary systems and language. Language was conceptualized in hermeneutic and social constructionist theories which emphasized the "interrelated relational nature of knowledge and the notion of self as linguistically constructed and transformed through dialogue" (Anderson, 1997, p. 44). These premises became "the

centerpoint of [Anderson's] conceptual underpinnings" (Anderson, 1997, p. 44). Hermeneutics, which refers to the process of understanding and interpretation, seeks to understand the meaning of a text, discourse or behavior while keeping in mind "the beliefs, assumptions, and intentions of the interpreter" (Anderson, 1997, p. 38). Hermeneutics presumes that the meaning a person arrives at will be, in some measure, a function of the forestructure that he or she brings to the event. Social constructionism, on the other hand, refers to a type of social inquiry. Anderson quotes Gergen (1985) who stated social constructionism is

> principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live.... [Social constructionism] views discourses about the world not as a reflection or map of the world but as an artifact of *communal interchange* [Anderson's emphasis]. (p. 266)

Neither contemporary hermeneutics nor social constructionism imply an established theoretical framework and subsequent methodology (Anderson, 1997, p. 37). Instead, each represents "an emerging framework for the critique of and provision of alternatives to dominant modernist concepts" (Anderson, 1997, p. 37). "Both examine taken-for-granted everyday beliefs and practices: how we produce and understand individuals and social institutions; how we participate in what we are creating, experiencing, and describing" (Giddens as cited in Anderson, 1997). "Both share an interpretive perspective that emphasizes meaning, meaning as constructed, not imposed" (Anderson, 1997, p. 37).

Knowledge and language

To consider knowledge as relational and language as generative is consistent with a postmodern perspective (Anderson, 1997). More specifically, knowledge is viewed as being socially constructed, communal, culture-bound, and fluid. As a social construction, knowledge results from individuals coming together in dialogue and arriving at a consensus regarding the interpretation and understanding of events and experiences (Anderson, 1997, p. 202). This view is in contrast to a modernist understanding of knowledge as an essence which sees it as existing separate and independent of the knower. Furthermore, that knowledge occurs in dialogue and is the product of consensus points to its communal nature. Knowledge is also culture-bound which is to say that it is bound by the systems of symbols that provide the context for its formation, communication, and perpetuation (Anderson, 1997, p. 202). Finally, knowledge is fluid, it changes. Knowledge is not, for instance, an entity that upon discovery remains static and fixed, unperturbed by new understandings and the passage of time. Anderson (1997) described language as the primary "vehicle through which we construct our realities" (p. 204). Through language "we ascribe meaning, make sense of our lives, give order to our world, and relate to our stories" (Anderson, 1997, p. 204). Language is active, constructs social realities, exists side-by-side with experience, and creates and conveys meaning.

Anderson (1997) used the term 'narrative' as a metaphor to refer to a form of discourse which describes the way in which people "organize, account for, give meaning to, and understand ... circumstances and events ..." (p. 212). Beyond providing structure, the narratives also serve to cohere events which, in turn, contribute to one's identity. Anderson

also pointed out, however, that the personal narratives or self-stories that make up one's identity "are always embedded in the local and universal multiple historical pasts and the cultural, social, and political contexts of our narrative making" (p. 215). Narratives, Anderson (1997) suggested, are a reflexive, two-way discursive process and referred to Gergen who suggested they are "stories [that] serve as communal resources that people use in ongoing relationships" (p. 213). It is a dialogical event occurring between one's self and others.

Collaborative systems

Unlike a hierarchical approach, collaborative language systems is conversational and is distinguished by principles "more horizontal, democratic, and egalitarian" (Anderson, 1997, p. 71). Instead of applying a forestructure to a problem, it is the "conversational partnership ... [that will] define membership, determine boundaries, and select the target of treatment" (Anderson, 1997, p.71). Collaborative language systems "is a view that emphasizes 'meaning' as created and experienced by individuals in conversation with one another" (Goolishian & Anderson, 1990, p. 106). This emphasis represents a shift away from viewing people as "information processing machines" to "information generating phenomena" (Goolishian, 1990, p. 44). Furthermore, collaborative systems prefers not to conceptualize problems in terms of social role and social structure which can restrict and pathologize rather than free and create space for self-agency. In relationship to other theories, particularly modernist, collaborative systems considers itself a "profound alternative" (Anderson, 1997, p. 93) rather than an antagonistic foe. At the same time that collaborative systems offers itself as an alternative, it also remains open to the constant critique which is constitutive of the postmodern position and therefore necessarily stands open to transformation and evolution.

Critique of modernist therapies

Anderson (1997) stated many clinicians have become disillusioned with modernist therapies where "therapists hold a dualistic, hierarchical position in which their knowledge supersedes clients' marginal or everyday nonprofessional knowledge" (p. 31). The modernist position presumes an entitlement to knowledge and truth which discounts client's knowledge. These modernists truths "ignore the rapid, ever-changing social, economic, political, and interpersonal world in which we live and they ignore the variations within this world" (Anderson, 1997, p. 31). In other words, the position of modernism presumes that a therapist's knowledge will somehow be more correct or, if not so boastful, then at least provide the description of a better form. Embracing such hubris invites a 'therapist-led endeavor' that is at risk of "dismissing the uniqueness, richness, and complexity of an individual or group of individuals" in favor of a "therapist's preknowledge" (Anderson, 1997, p. 32). While such positions can contribute to "a sense of legitimacy, confidence, and predictability" (Anderson, 1997, p. 77) for both the professional and the client, the forestructure they bring to the therapeutic process limits and narrows possible solutions.

Concerns regarding modernist approaches

Anderson (1997) voiced concern regarding those approaches that fail "to take into account the contexts and cultures in which local therapy discourse and universal discourses about therapy take place and in which the client and the therapist live and work" (p. 70). Operating without such awareness of this larger context, a therapeutic approach may subjugate or sacrifice a client to the influences of the dominant voice or, in other words, the "culturally designated professional voice" (Anderson, 1997, p. 71). These professional

systems usually demand or encourage a particular way of thinking that "create space-defining parameters that define the role in which a therapist thinks and works" (Anderson, 1997, p. 71). The collaborative approach, on the other hand, "aims to create a space and to facilitate a process in which unworkable problematic situations or narratives can be transformed into workable ones with possibilities" (Anderson, 1997, p. 77).

Characteristics of problems and problem-determined systems

People are intentional agents who create themselves and their environments in continuous communicative interaction with others (Anderson, 1997, p. 109). Among the reasons people enter therapy are the experiences of conversational breakdowns which can contribute to a lack of self-agency. These conversational breakdowns, from the collaborative system's perspective, exist in language. Human systems are, after all, relational systems which are based upon language interaction. Consequently, the problem around which a relational system has 'coalesced' exists in the domain of language. "A problem definition is ... a narrative that someone has developed" (Anderson, 1997, p. 73). "Problems are linguistic events, or positions, that are often interpreted and described in conflicting ways" (Anderson, 1997, p. 74). In this instance, the relational system, which exists in a state of delicate balance between interdependent narratives, is upset. Furthermore, despite a multiplicity of narratives that may surround the person, the problem-determined system does not have the resources to "yield the necessary possibilities" (Anderson, 1997, p. 83). Consequently, collaborative systems seek to 'dis-solve' the problem by attending to the language and the context in which the problem has arisen. However, this idea of an upset in the balance of interrelated narratives, as the definition of a problem, was nuanced when Anderson agreed with Shotter (as cited in

Anderson, 1997, p. 92) who suggested that the difference between a problematic and a non-problematic situation may be a difference in a way-of-being. A way-of-being refers to how a person positions or situates him or herself in relation to his or her story as well as the stories of others. Consequently, beyond drawing attention to how a person's self-story relates to other personal narratives and cultural discourses, a way-of-being also draws attention to how a person relates to his or her own self-story.

Therapy and self-of-therapist

Anderson (1997) claimed that a collaborative systems approach to therapy seeks to help people tell their first-person narratives so that they may transform their self-identities to ones that permit them to develop understandings of their lives and its events, that allow multiple possibilities for ways of being in and acting in the world at any given time and in any given circumstance, and that help them gain access to and express or execute agency or a sense of self-agency. (p. 234)

"Therapy is a process of expanding and saying the 'unsaid'" (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988, p. 381). Collaborative systems operates on the belief that developing first-person narratives will encourage clients to accept responsibility and accountability. At the same time, however, it recognizes that are many contexts in which the opportunity to exercise self-responsibility has been taken away (Anderson, 1997, p. 105). With this in mind, the collaborative therapist, by not assuming a position of authority and expertise, in the area of content, encourages the client to be responsible for him or herself. A distinguishing feature of collaborative systems is the position assumed by the therapist which does not presume to 'know,' at any time really, how to solve a client's problem. This position presumes that the client, not the therapist, is the

expert in the content of his or her own life. On the other hand, this posture expects the therapist to be an expert in facilitating a dialogical conversation that creates "the opportunity for self-agency, freedom, and possibilities" (Anderson, 1997, p. 94).

Anderson described this posture as an intentional and purposive philosophical stance. Anderson (1997) said she purposively chooses "to be open, genuine, appreciative, respectful, inviting, and curious" because she "values it" (p. 107). This way-of-being describes her chosen way of being in the world, both personally and professionally. Anderson (1997) acknowledged that this therapeutic stance brings with it her own "values and biases" and "represents and *encourages* [emphasis added] a way of looking at and experiencing the world" (p. 94). On the other hand, Anderson's position of being open and engaged in a 'dialogical' conversation means that she risks being changed also. "The process of understanding is the process of immersing ourselves in the other's horizon, and vice versa—each being open to the other" (Anderson, 1997, p. 39). From the perspective of the self-of-therapist, "it is as much about our self-narratives, the way we define ourselves as persons ... as it is about the client's self-definitions and identities" (Anderson, 1997, p. 10).

Aim of the therapist

As a conversational expert, the aim of the therapist is to facilitate both internal and external dialogue which creates opportunities for "newness in meanings, narratives, behaviors, feelings, and emotions" (Anderson, 1997, p. 98). This newness, which is experienced in the therapeutic conversation, leads to "self-agency and problem dissolution" (Anderson, 1997, p. 109). The collaborative therapist "participate[s] in a process that maximizes the opportunity for [self-agency] to emerge" (Anderson, 1997, p. 231). One way a collaborative therapist

participates in a conversation is by "asking questions from a position of 'not-knowing'" (Goolishian, 1990, p. 44). Asked from this position, these questions are neither rhetorical nor pedagogical. Similar to Socratic questions, these do not imply the direction of the answer, but rather, "imply many possible answers" (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992, p. 34). The therapist seeks to encourage "multiple verses" (Anderson, 1997, p. 97).

Kenneth Gergen and Social Constructionism

Kenneth Gergen is a professor of psychology at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania. He is the author of numerous publications and books including *Realities and relationships: Soundings in social constructionism* (1994) and *The Saturated self: Dilemmas of identity in contemporary life* (1991). Gergen serves as an associate editor for the *American Psychologist* as well as on the editorial board for *Family Process*, *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, and *Contemporary Social Theory*, among others.

Gergen (1991) uses the term postmodernism "as a way of defining the current conditions both within and outside the academic sphere" (p. xi). At the same time, however, he recognizes difficulties employing the term particularly when it has such broad applications across so many disciplines. Gergen (1991) suggested that the postmodern condition present in culture is a consequence of social saturation (p. xi). "We are now bombarded with ever increasing intensity by the images and actions of others; our range of social participation is expanding exponentially" (Gergen, 1991, p. 15). Contemporary culture is not, however, without antecedent influences, particularly the romantic and the modern (Gergen, 1991, p. 6).

The self vis-à-vis postmodernism

By way of introducing features of postmodernism, Gergen (1991) invites consideration of the romantic and modern view of the self and how "the process of social saturation is producing a profound change in our ways of understanding" (1991, p. 6). The romantic view of the self is one "that attributes to each person characteristics of personal depth: passion, soul, creativity, and moral fiber" (Gergen, 1991, p. 6). The romanticist perspective is one "that lays central stress on unseen, even sacred forces that dwell deep within the person, forces that give life and relationships their significance" (Gergen, 1991, p. 19). Those who tend towards secularism view this deep interior as both a passionate and dangerous force of nature. For people of a religious nature, this force presiding deep within them is considered to be the soul (Gergen, 1991, p. 20).

The language that surrounds these characteristics, said Gergen (1991), "is essential to the formation of deeply committed relations, dedicated friendships, and life purposes" (p. 6). Gergen suggested that the loss of this language would contribute to "the collapse of anything meaningful in life" (1991, p. 27). Life without this language would be staid, colorless, one dimensional, functional and passionless. The romanticists have provided us with "a vocabulary that generates awe of heroes, of genius, and of inspired work" (Gergen, 1991, p. 27). On the other hand, Gergen (1991) said there was little about romantic language that is practical or rational. By the early twentieth century, romanticism was being threatened by the rise of the modernist worldview (p. 6).

The growth of modern thought is linked with the ascendancy of science which, through its application of reason and rigorous methodology, contributed to enormous

developments and improvements in medicine, food production, sanitation and housing (Gergen, 1991, p. 29). With these remarkable successes the idea emerged that science could do for the social realm what it did for the physical sciences. With this in mind, scholars set about applying the same methodology to the social sciences with the expectation of ushering in a golden era. The hope and the expectations that accompanied this view were shared by so many that it ascended to the level of a grand narrative. "The grand narrative is one of continuous upward movement—improvement, conquest, achievement—toward some goal" (Gergen, 1991, p. 30).

Consequently, the view of the self as possessing a deep interior was abandoned by modernists in favor of what was observable. It was believed that through observation and the application of reason the character of a person was revealed (Gergen, 1991, p. 39). Towards the study and understanding of people, psychologists turned to the machine as a guiding metaphor, perhaps not fully cognizant of the metaphorical implications (Gergen, 1991, p. 40). Said Gergen (1991), a therapist applying this metaphor "operated much as a mechanic repairing a broken Maytag" (p. 42). Ultimately, a modern concept emerged that viewed persons as predictable, honest, and sincere (1991, p. 6). "The modernist self is not likely to have his reason clouded by intense emotional dramas; his reasons guide his actions and his voice is clear and honest" (Gergen, 1991, p. 47).

The socially saturated self

Gergen (1991) suggested that the contemporary experience of social saturation, an expression of postmodernism, is having a deleterious impact upon both the romantic and the modern beliefs about the self as well as supporting social arrangements (p. 6). "Social

saturation furnishes us with a multiplicity of incoherent and unrelated languages of the self" (Gergen, 1991, p. 6). Social forces pull people in so many different directions that they find themselves acting in multiple and sometimes disparate capacities. Rather than having a stable identity predicated upon a minimum number of roles, as would have been the case earlier this century, one's identity may correspond "to a multiplicity of incoherent and disconnected relationships" (Gergen, 1991, p. 7). Gergen (1991) described the assumption of multiples selves or partial identities resulting from being connected to increasingly more opinions, values, and lifestyles as contributing to a "multiphrenic condition" (p. 49). Historical examples of advances in technology allowing people to become increasingly connected include the telegraph, railroad, telephone, radio broadcasting and printed books. (Gergen, 1991). While some of these avenues of connectedness continue to exist, modern technology has furnished us with an extraordinary new number of ways to maintain an interconnectedness that is faster and traverses greater distances, i.e., faxes, email, cell phones, chat rooms and electronic bulletin boards. "As we absorb the views, values, and visions of others, and live out the multiple plots in which we are enmeshed, we enter a postmodern consciousness" (Gergen, 1991, p. 15).

It should be pointed out that the Gergen's description of the postmodern condition of the self is not meant as a replacement or alternative to either the romantic or modern perspective. "The postmodern condition more generally is marked by a plurality of voices vying for the right to reality—to be accepted as legitimate expressions of the true and the good" (Gergen, 1991, p. 7). Rather than being exclusive, expressions of postmodernism intend to be inclusive. "Under postmodern conditions, persons exist in a state of continuous

construction and reconstruction; it is a world where anything goes that can be negotiated" (Gergen, 1991, p. 7).

Characteristics of a postmodern consciousness

Two characteristics of this postmodern consciousness are a multiphrenic condition and the social construction of reality. Multiphrenia represents a new pattern of social consciousness and refers "to the splitting of the individual into a multiplicity of self-investments" (Gergen, 1991, p. 74). For instance, the multiphrenic person is no longer constrained, in the same measure, by time and space. Where one's social relationships in the not so distant past were largely restricted to the local community and news was carried by horseback, today many people are globally connected and travel great distances with ease. "In effect, the potential for new connection and new opportunities is practically unlimited" (Gergen, 1991, p. 75). However, Gergen suggested that this interconnectedness comes with price. Where people could once remain reasonably secure in a more or less homogenized worldview shared by a local community, the contemporary person, with acquaintances and relationships spanning the country and globe, is confronted by a plurality of cultures, values and political orientations. As a consequence, the range of the 'good' or the 'proper' expands and the certainty of 'how things are,' diminishes (Gergen, 1991, p. 76). Any individual who pauses long enough to consider circumstances from the perspective of the other is certain to be challenged by competing descriptions and confronts the postmodern condition.

The social construction of reality claims that "discourse about the world [is viewed] not as a reflection or map of the world but as an artifact of communal interchange" (Gergen, 1985, p. 266). Words, rather than possessing an inherent representation that manifests in

sound or symbol the essence of the object it signifies, are sounds and symbols re-presenting a reality and maintaining coherence through consensual use. The measure in which understandings remain the same from one day to the next, said Gergen (1985) has less to do with empirical validation of social perspectives than unpredictable social processes. Knowledge or understanding is the consequence of a consensus among people at a given time in history instead of an immutable fact that, once discovered, passes unchanged from one generation to the next.

Social constructionism

Those who subscribe to the social construction of reality participate, even if only passively, in the movement of social constructionism. Although tensions have emerged within constructionist thought, Gergen (1985) described the social constructionist inquiry as being "principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live" (p. 266). In this capacity, social constructionism operates as a form of social criticism that casts doubt upon taken-for-granted assumptions found in routine daily life or in a specialized discipline. For example, constructionism would encourage the examination of conventional social categories, i.e., gender, morality, or psychological disorders, through a consideration of the historical and cultural circumstances from which these understandings emerged.

Social constructionism suggests that the meanings of words or phrases like the 'mind' or 'romantic love' have no "real world referent, but [are derived] from their context of usage" (Gergen, 1985, p. 267). Whether or not a consensus perseveres among those persons engaged in conversations, ideas and understandings are communicated through discourses which, in

time, contribute to social patterns (Gergen, 1985, p. 168). As these social patterns emerge, preferred ways of viewing and understanding social phenomena also evolve that "serve to sustain and support certain patterns to the exclusion of others" (Gergen, 1985, p. 268).

Social constructionism as a form of social criticism

As a form of social criticism, Gergen (1997) suggested that a constructionist dialogue can be potentially devastating. Social constructionist dialogues, if fully extended, "have the capability of undermining, dissolving, or rendering suspicious, even meaningless, any form of advocacy, declaration, authority, or protest—including their own" (1997, p. 218). Constructionism accomplishes this, in part, by situating concepts in a history and a culture creating an awareness of their functional temporality, that is, as "institutionally useful, normatively sustained, and subject to deterioration and decay as social history unfolds" (Gergen, 1985, p. 271). Consider for instance how Gergen, from a social constructionist perspective, treats traditional humanist conceptualizations of subjective experience, human agency, individual liberty, and moral responsibility.

Subjective experience

For the humanist, subjective experience is seen as inseparable from one's identity and, therefore, very important (Gergen, 1997, p. 218). Humanism characterizes subjective experience as an uniquely inner experience. Constructionism, on the other hand, sees human experience as occurring in the context of relationships (Gergen, 1997, p. 222). Even feelings attributed to individuals like happiness, sadness, anger are seen as occurring within a communal environment in addition to possessing characteristics unique to historical and

cultural conditions. For the constructionist, subjective experience occurs as part of a relational process.

Human agency

Humanists view human agency as responsible deliberation taking place in the consciousness of the individual. Agency, from a humanist perspective, originates from the individual. An implication of this view suggest that issues and inquiries relating to culture and society have, as their departure point, the individual. Constructionists, however, argue that individual action can best be understood by examining the conditions and circumstances that both precede and inform it. Not surprisingly, constructionism would challenge the suggestion that all traces of cultural influence could be removed so as to create a context for an completely unbiased individual decision. The social constructionist perspective views human agency as embedded within patterns of relationship (Gergen, 1997, p. 225). With this in mind, concepts like accountability and responsibility are seen as shared activities. The implication of this view is that by simply holding an individual responsible without any contextual consideration "we effectively deny our participation in the culture [and treat] ourselves as the overseeing eye, suspended above the acts of mortals" (Gergen, 1997, p. 225).

Individual liberty

By valuing individual liberty, humanism affirms each person's "capacity for free and responsible action" (Gergen, 1997, p. 220). To oppress liberty would be to deny individual expression and that right coveted by all individuals in the United States. From a constructionist perspective, liberty reflects a person's freedom of choice, but choice within a social context. The constructionists would likely also point out that those who champion

individual liberty do so, not to themselves, but to other members within the community which in itself implies social relatedness.

Moral responsibility

Moral responsibility, from a humanist perspective, points to a decision made by an individual that, at once, respects his or her fundamental right to choose, and reflects choices that do not impugn upon the rights of others. While free to choose, individuals remain accountable to other members of society for their actions. Society operates upon the assumption that most individuals will make decisions bases upon principles that respect and preserve the rights of others. Yet Gergen questions how a person can develop a set of moral principles separate and apart from one's culture. Is it possible to develop moral principles in a vacuum? Extending this thought, if moral deliberation is a cultural phenomena, why is it that single individuals, instead of families, friends, or professional associates, are singularly held responsible for their actions. Is there room for discourse that considers a culture's or society's culpability in individual action that falls outside the pail of acceptable? A constructionist alternative to morality based upon dogmatic principles is one situated in patterns of relationships. Moral judgments would be spread over the network of relations which form the context in which issues of right and wrong emerge. Although not precluding solutions for specific circumstances within local communities, the aim of social constructionism is to encourage a mingling of "the discourses, enabling alterior signifiers to play freely—to form new combinations, new metaphors, and ultimately new forms of interdependence (Gergen, 1997, p. 227).

Gergen (1994) also points out that "constructionism does not dictate an alternative foundation for moral action" (p. 94). While critics view this stance as promoting moral decay, Gergen claims that the constructionist challenge of dogmatic principles is not a call to abandon moral or political commitments but an effort to locate morality in patterns of social relationship. Constructionism seeks a criteria other than traditional truth-claims predicated upon foundational rules (Gergen, 1985, p. 273).

Social relatedness as a postmodern feature

Gergen believes that the notion of social relatedness is a far richer conceptualization to explore the idea of a 'good society.' The emphasis of constructionism, in this exploration, is focused upon patterns of relationship in the midst of diversity rather than reified dogmatic principles. This approach would replace the imperialism of a universal ethic in favor of a posture that views problems and conflicts through 'multiple lenses.' It is a posture that would enrich the range of understandings and broaden sensitivities. The hope for the good society, then, would not depend upon the shaping of persons to principles but on invitations to engage in mutually agreeable actions (Gergen, 1994, p. 111).

The danger and promise of constructionism

According to Gergen, constructionism does not attempt to establish or institute a code of ethics. On the other hand, "nothing about constructionist relativism denies the possibility of moral commitment" (Gergen, 1994, p. 113). The intention behind constructionist thought is not to discourage ethical engagement, but to discourage ethical commitments that claim superiority by appealing to a "justificatory base" (Gergen, 1994, p. 113). In describing the potential danger of a movement towards a universal ethic, Gergen quotes Caputo (1993) who

wrote that the greatest "violence would be to stop the slippage, to erase the ambiguity, to take the play out of events, to put events out of play and into order, to hierarchize them, to erect principal authorities who would give authorized interpretations and definitive solutions and judgments"

Michael Mahoney and Social Constructivism

Michael Mahoney is a professor at the University of North Texas. He has authored fifteen books including *Human Change Processes* (1991), *Cognition and Constructive Psychotherapies* (1995), and (with R. A. Neimeyer) *Constructivism in Psychotherapy* (1995). Mahoney is also the Executive Director of the journal *Constructivism in the Human Sciences*.

Postmodernism

Mahoney (1995) refers to postmodernism as a worldview or philosophical perspective "that acknowledges the complexity, relativity, and intersubjectivity of all human experience" (p. 407). Features of postmodernism include the lack of an absolute foundation for human belief systems, the absence of an essentialized self and a view of science as an interpretative endeavor. Additionally, postmodernism judges "the adequacy of a position in part by whether it yields a useful critique of unquestioned dominant practices and ideologies" (1995, p. 407).

Mahoney (1995) points out the emergence of postmodernism, as well as postrationalism, reflect "developments that transcend philosophy and the academic disciplines; they are reflections of planetary life in the post decade of the twentieth century" (p. 40). He suggests that among the factors contributing to these developments is "the phenomenon of globalization in communication, travel, technology, technology, economics, and political ideology [which] has dramatically challenged identities and the ethical norms associated with

nationalities, races, cultures, religions, physical abilities, age, and lifestyles" (1995, p. 394). The magnitude of these emerging changes represents a third axial shift emphasizing "the relativity of all absolutes" (1991, p. 95).

Mahoney (1991) says that the first axial period occurred around the sixth century BC when organized religion and rational philosophy began to supplant mythical and supernatural metaphors (p. 29). While Buddhism and Zoroastrianism were being formed independently of each other in Europe and Asia, Greek philosophers like Thales and Pythagoras were stressing the power of intellect and reason (1991, p. 29). The second axial period began sometime between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries through a series of revolutions that transformed much of the everyday lives of people in Europe (1991, p. 42). Characteristics of this second axial period were "a dramatic shift back to sensation and toward an expanding engagement with the world" (1991, p. 42). Pivotal figures participating in this remarkable period of progress include Copernicus, Bacon, Galileo, Descartes, and Newton.

The third axial shift, though it remains a work in progress says Mahoney (1991), is characterized by relativity and criticism (p. 45). As an example of the criticism, Mahoney (1991) draws attention to the emergence of feminists studies which has articulated an "intolerance of the authorities who have previously dominated 'acceptable' thinking about thinking" (p. 45). Another area of study supporting a feature of postmodernism is physics where scientists have demonstrated that time, space, and perspective are all relative. In psychology and the social sciences an increasing emphasis is being placed upon decentralized control models in addition to a greater appreciation for the dynamics of related systems (1991, p. 47). In ontology, constructivism has emerged and gathered support "for its attempts to

integrate the dynamic reciprocity between living systems and their environments" (1991, p. 46).

Social constructivism

Mahoney (1991) defines social constructivism as a family of theories that emphasize three interrelated principles of human experience. First, humans are proactive participants in their own perception, memory, and knowing. Second, the ordering processes organizing human lives operate predominantly at tacit levels of awareness. Third, learning, knowing, and memory are viewed as the ongoing attempts of "individualized, self-organizing processes that tend to favor the maintenance (over the modification) of experiential patterns" (1995, p. 45)

Humans as proactive

With regard to constructivism's first feature, individuals are seen as acting directly on their immediate environment as well and having the environment act upon them. Proactive cognition and participatory knowing, from a constructivist model, includes the idea of a *feedforward* mechanism that acts "to prepare the organism for some selective subset of possible experiences" (1991, p. 100). As an illustration of the feedward mechanism, Mahoney references Maturana and Varela's (1987) description of visual experience and neurochemical activity in the visual cortex. Presuming a high correlation between visual experiences supplied by the retina and neurochemical activity in the visual cortex, Maturana and Varela contend that impulses coming from the retina only account for 20 percent of the neurochemical activity in the cortex. The suspicion is that the other 80 percent is a consequence of a tacit construction being 'fed forward' by other neurological sites of the brain.

"Feedforward mechanisms in perception are but one illustration of a whole family of constructive processes in thought, memory, and the various other 'faculties' of mind and consciousness" (1991, p. 102). Feedforward mechanisms are "important in that they emphasize the extent to which much of what we experience throughout the days of our lives are the changing states of our own structure, not the raw forces of the external world" (1991, p. 102). "The single most practical implication of motor metatheory and the concept of feedforward mechanism is that we are active participants in the construction and experience of the whole range of human thought, feeling, and action" (1991, p. 103).

Of course, the implication for a personal experience dominated by the feedforward process is that much of that personal experience is not new. Instead, persons are projecting "past and familiar personal life theories onto each arriving moment and, not surprisingly, life flows on as usual" (1991, p. 104). Furthermore, if one extends this line thought with regard to learning, then learning is predicated upon introducing a measure of novelty and an exposure to experiences that are not easily subsumed by a feedforward mechanism.

Tacit Processes

"The second major feature of psychological constructivism is the assertion that learning and knowing necessarily involve predominantly tacit (beyond awareness) processes that constrain (but do not specify) the contents of conscious experience" (1991, p 104). An example of knowing occurring beyond a person's conscious awareness is an athlete who performs with extraordinary skill without consciously thinking in advance about each specific action. The tacitization process can also be describe as a person's nervous system automating

a repetitive skill so that little, if any, conscious thought is require to accomplish it like tying one's shoelace or driving a car.

Attributing the thought to Friedrich Hayek, Mahoney (1991) says that "perceptions and all manner of other cognitive activities often reflect more about their owner than they do about the events in the physical world that may have occasioned them" (p. 106). Hayek contended that many neural processes occur within the architecture of the brain that are simply beyond one's conscious awareness. While some scientists concede that there are unconscious processes occurring in the subcortex, Mahoney (1991) suggests it is increasingly recognized "that tacit ordering processes are involved in all aspects of our lives and in all parts of our brain and body" (p. 108).

Anticipating the comments that the idea of tacit understanding appears to bear resemblance to Freud's notion of the unconscious, Mahoney maintains there are significant differences. Primarily, Hayek prefers the term 'super-conscious' to describe the tacit processes determining the sensory qualities of one's conscious since "they govern the conscious processes without appearing in them" (as cited in Mahoney, 1991, p. 108).

Another characteristic of abstract orders is that they appear to be fundamentally negative. Mahoney refers to a phrase of Wiemer who calls these abstract orders 'contexts of constraints' (as cited in Mahoney, 1991, p. 109). The notion is that at both the individual and social level, these abstract orders serve to protect life and maintain social order through prohibitions (1991, p. 109).

Humans as self-organizing

The third characteristic of psychological constructivism is found in the view that learning, knowing, and memory represent ongoing attempts for a self to organize one's own patterns of action and experience within an environment (1991, p. 95). Yet, with regard to constructivist self-organization, Mahoney (1991) identifies two important variants that are differentiated by "their stance regarding idealism and realism" (p. 111).

Radical constructivism argues "that there is no (even hypothetical) reality beyond our personal experience" (1991, p. 111). Radical constructivism rejects both objectivism as well as realism and contends that all experience is a personal construction (1995, p. 53). While some radical constructivists dismiss as relatively insignificant a person's physical environment as a influence in the construction of experiences, others claim that language is very important in shaping personal identity and social relations (1995, p. 403).

Critical constructivists, on the other hand, acknowledge that objects are indeed present in the universe but deny that we can directly know them. From the perspective of a critical constructivist, individuals are seen as co-creating their personal realities within a social and physical environment that possesses 'real' boundaries and 'real' constraints (1991, p. 112). The critical constructivist does not deny realism but does deny the possibility of developing a direct correspondence between an ontological reality and its epistemological equivalent (1995, p. 53).

Issues and implications of social constructivism

Mahoney (1995) contends that the scope of changes occurring across the globe in the twentieth century have and will continue to impact developments in psychology and

psychotherapy (p. 40). In fact, he concurs with a comment made by Donald Campbell in an address to the American Psychological Association in 1975 when he said, "we must be willing to venture risks that take us beyond dehumanizing and destructive dogmas" (1991, p. 7).

At the same time, Mahoney (1991) acknowledges that "recent attempts to elaborate constructivist approaches to counseling and psychotherapy have met with some resistance among orthodox behaviorists" (p. 114). He suggests that these criticisms "often reflect a continuing reluctance to tolerate (or acknowledge) some of the ambiguities necessitated by human complexity" (1991, p. 114).

Of course, Mahoney (1995) admits that there are "problems with constructivism that deserve consideration" (p. 53). Specifically there is the problem with the multiple meanings attached to the terms 'constructive' and 'construction' as well as sometimes blurred distinctions between the radical and critical constructivist (1995, p. 53). Indeed, Mahoney suspects that what it means to be a constructivist therapist is a matter that will likely persist into the twenty-first century (1995). Further making the task of definition and distinction problematic is that characteristic of constructivism which "asks its adherents to maintain such a degree of self-examining openness, to so painstakingly tolerate and harvest (rather than eliminate) ambiguity, or to so thoroughly question both the answers and the questions by which they inquire" (1995, p. 385).

Viewing constructivism favorably, and having identified the ambiguity and uncertainty present in the constructivist position, Mahoney also encourages, among those therapists whose practice is informed by this position, that any changes introduced be sensitive both to clients and cultures. As therapists and as members of a larger community, Mahoney (1991)

suggests that we bear a privileged responsibility to be attentive to the contexts informing clients' lives and therefore as therapists we must be careful not to encourage change that would result in an unmanageable situation (p. 117). Mahoney (1991) claims that "psychological services can be rendered in a manner that is respectful of the complex reciprocity between individuals and their social contexts" (p. 117).

Value of this Inquiry to the Field of Martial and Family Therapy

With regard to the value of this inquiry, it seems reasonable to presume that issues articulated in the professional journals merit attention. Additionally, extending the understanding of theories informing approaches to therapy adds to the field's body of knowledge. Finally, efforts to extend theories in new and emerging areas of inquiry contribute to the evolution of original ideas.

Researcher's Bias

It is the assumption of the researcher that the language and concepts found in postmodern thought provide a compelling description of certain social phenomena, i.e., the power of cultural discourses to marginalize. At the same time, however, the interviewer believes that social discourses are constitutive to society and culture. Consequently, the interviewer sees a potential danger in the practical application of versions of postmodern theory that would seem to encourage the subversion of society or social discourses without any commitment to an aesthetic criteria.

It is further a presumption of this inquiry that a field of study benefits from efforts to introduce clarity with regard to words that are routinely found in the professional literature. It is also an assumption of the researcher that sustained ambiguity, like that employed by a

deconstructionist, could deconstruct theories and ideas that inform the practice of therapy without offering any replacement.

Research Questions

How do notable figures in the field of family therapy respond to criticism that postmodernism encourages an attitude of 'anything goes?' How are these contributors making distinctions between concepts often seen as related to or synonymous with postmodernism?

Method

This study proposes to address issues related to postmodernism in the field of therapy by asking three notable contributors, Harlene Anderson, Kenneth Gergen, and Michael Mahoney, to respond to questions. In general, the questions will address criticism expressed in family therapy literature, understandings of postmodernism, and features of postmodernism present in the contributors work.

Lincoln and Guba (1994) suggest that progress within a qualitative research project, informed by a constructivist paradigm, occurs when "everyone formulates more informed and sophisticated constructions and becomes more aware of the content and meaning of competing constructions" (p. 113). These formulations which occur within local cultures, that is, "small groups, formal organizations, and other domains of everyday life, condition what we encounter and how we make sense of it" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994, p. 268). From this perspective, the respondents of this inquiry can be seen as having contributed to a body of local knowledge. Local knowledge coalesces into a local culture which is understood as "a set of more or less regularized ways of assigning meanings and responding to things" (Gubrium as cited in Holstein & Gubrium, 1994, p. 268).

Participants

The respondents in this inquiry are Harlene Anderson, Kenneth Gergen, and Michael Mahoney. These respondents were identified by several academics within the field of marriage and family therapy as key contributors to discussions and publications regarding postmodernism, social constructionism and social constructivism within the realm of therapy.

Procedure

The method of inquiry will be the structured interview. Interviewing can be used for furthering the understanding of an individual or group perspective (Fontana & Frey, 1994). The respondents all made themselves available to answer questions posed by the researcher. Both Kenneth Gergen and Harlene Anderson agreed to provide written responses to the researcher's questions. Michael Mahoney agreed to respond to the questions by way of a face-to-face interview. With regard to the appropriateness of these types of interviews, Fontana and Frey (1994) point out that interviewing can assume many different forms from face-to-face verbal interchanges to telephone surveys to mailed questionnaires. In a key informant interview, "the interviewer collects data from individuals who have special knowledge or perceptions that would not otherwise be available to the researcher" (Gall, et al., 1996, p. 306).

Research Questions

The following questions were emailed or otherwise provided to the respondents[2]:

1. How would you define postmodernism?

[2] In questions 3, 9 and 10 provided to Michael Mahoney, "social constructionism" was changed to read "social constructivism."

2. Do you recognize versions of postmodernism?
3. How would you distinguish between postmodernism and social constructionism?
4. How do you answer the criticism of postmodernism that it may promote an attitude of 'anything goes?'
5. What constrains a theoretical approach that is antifoundational?
6. Presuming there are versions of postmodernism, or at least different emphases that can be attributed to the major representatives, do you believe versions or emphases exist that are incongruent with the practice of therapy?
7. Do you believe that there has been an adequate response specifically to the criticism of postmodernism in the family therapy literature?
8. What aspects of postmodernism or features of postmodernism are applied or manifested in your work?
9. Who would be the significant figures that you would identify as influencing your own ideas of postmodernism and/or social constructionism?
10. Would you identify any particular factors that may contribute to the continued criticism of postmodern and social construction perspectives in the literature?
11. Does the lack of coherence with regard to the meaning and use of postmodernism in the professional literature threaten scholarly research and/or clinical applications?

12. How would you distinguish between social constructivism and social constructionism? (asked of Michael Mahoney only[3]).

The preceding questions were crafted by the interviewer following many readings and re-readings of articles and books discussing postmodern thought in general as well as within the fields of the social sciences and humanities. The questions seek to address general concern and criticism of postmodernism as articulated in professional journals, distinguish between commonly used terms, and identify those figures who have influenced the respondent's thought. The final aim of a constructivist methodology "is to distill a consensus construction that is more informed and sophisticated than any of the predecessor constructions" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111).

Analysis of data

Qualitative research requires that steps be taken to assure the data collected and reported accurately reflects the comments of the respondents. The following techniques will be used to increase the credibility of this inquiry.

Triangulation

Three key contributors to discussions regarding approaches to therapy influenced by conceptualizations influenced by postmodernism will participate by responding to a set of questions. Person triangulation, that is, using several individuals as a data source, is identified as a type of data triangulation (Fielding & Fielding, 1986, p. 25).

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[3] Respondents Harlene Anderson and Kenneth Gergen had already completed and returned their responses to the research questions when the third participant, Michael Mahoney, agreed to make himself available. Originally, Lynn Hoffman had agreed but subsequently became unavailable. Since Mahoney distinguishes himself as a critical constructivist, the researcher sought to take advantage of the opportunity to ask a further question of distinction.

Internal audit

The data collection and analysis procedure was review by an individual experienced in qualitative research to assure a rigorous data collection procedure.

Analysis procedure

The following steps were followed for the data analysis. First, Harlene Anderson and Ken Gergen provided written responses to the research questions. Second, an interview was conducted with Michael Mahoney then transcribed. Third, each transcript was read multiple times toward gaining an understanding of the respondent's answer to each question. Fourth, the researcher attempted to identify areas of contrast and comparison by the respondents within each question.

Reliability and validity of study

In qualitative research, "there are no straightforward tests for reliability and validity" (Patton, 1990, p. 372). Instead, one looks at the trustworthiness of the study which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The credibility of a study depends upon careful and rigorous methods for gathering and analyzing high quality data; the skill, competence, training, and experience of the researcher; and the researcher's philosophical belief in and appreciation of qualitative research (Patton, 1990).

Triangulation allows the research to be more reliable and valid through the researcher comparing and cross-checking the consistence of the data on an ongoing basis (Patton, 1990; Morse, 1994).

Transferability of a study's findings is accomplished by providing a thick description of the data which allows others to decide whether the results can be generalized to a particular

group. The research provided the data while readers of the study's result judge whether the findings are transferable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The dependability of a study is established through an inquiry audit in which a qualified person outside the study examines the process of data collection and analysis and the results of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The research is valid if an explanation of the data fits the description of the data (Janesick, 1994, p. 216). For the present study, the data collection and analysis was reviewed by individuals experienced in qualitative research to insure a rigorous procedure.

The confirmability of the present inquiry is accomplished by the researcher keeping an audit trail. The audit trail includes raw data and any notes or materials used in the data collection and analysis. The validity of the questions posed to the respondents was established through a review by academicians and clinicians experienced in family therapy.

Results

Does postmodernism promote an attitude of 'anything goes'?

Anderson said that the association, by critics, of "pluralism, multiplicity, and uncertainty" with 'anything goes' is a "misunderstanding or disagreement with the notion that knowledge and language are dynamic, generative, and relational." It is this notion that contributes to the idea that meaning is both fluid and unstable. Gergen said that to the best of his knowledge, no one who has participated in postmodern dialogues has ever advocated a position of 'anything goes.' Gergen said, "there are always constraints." Anderson and Gergen views are similar in the measure that they deny that postmodernism promotes a carte blanche attitude of 'anything goes' absent of any external conditions. Mahoney, like Gergen, asserted

the existence of constraints by saying "there are limitations on what people can construct as any given point in time." Mahoney also made a distinction between the social and the physical when he affirmed his belief "that there is furniture in the universe and that if you step out into the street without looking, you're going to be an ex-constructivist." Although Mahoney and Gergen spoke about 'constraints' and 'limitations,' Mahoney did suggest that postmodernism could encourage a range of constructions that extended "too far" in either a negative or positive direction. However, acknowledging that postmodernism could be responsible for encouraging constructions outside Mahoney's range of the acceptable is different than saying that postmodern promotes an attitude of 'anything goes.' For instance, Mahoney said that while he believes in opportunity theory, he would not respond "to someone who has just been raped, victimized or violated by saying, 'Look, the meaning of this is simply a construction in your head.'"

What constrains a theoretical approach that is anti-foundational?

Anderson preferred not to use the word 'foundation' to describe her work since it has a tendency to mean "a single view that is deemed correct, or the most correct, based on true and objective understanding." Instead, Anderson's approach is anti-foundational in the sense that the assumptions upon which her "work is based are thought of 'as in motion,' always open to review, critique, change, and deletion." Consequently, where anti-foundationalism understands truth and knowledge as "historically, culturally, and linguistically embedded," theoretical approaches will also be constrained by these dimensions. Gergen said that a theoretical approach is constrained by its own ontology and ethic. Mahoney said that theoretical approaches that are anti-foundational or anti-authoritarian are constrained by the

creativity of the participants as well as a wise sense of timing. Also, in answering this question, Mahoney was reminded of Thomas Kuhn's response to criticism following the publication of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Mahoney reported that Kuhn claimed some people mistakenly interpreted his work as "portraying the revolutionaries as heroes and the traditionalists—the protectors of normal science and the old paradigm—as the bad guys. Instead, said Mahoney, Kuhn's point "was that you have to have a balance between what is changing and what is remaining." Building upon this point, Mahoney maintains that if change occurs too rapidly and the revolution becomes anarchy, then "coherence in the order of the system that is trying to organize itself" is lost.

Consequently, a theoretical approach that is anti-foundational will be constrained by history, culture, and language (Anderson); ontology and ethics (Gergen); and creativity, timing, and a measure of coherence in the midst of change (Mahoney). Although each respondent acknowledged the presence of constraints, the nature of the constraints differed.

Does the lack of coherence with regard to the meaning or definition of postmodernism in the professional literature threaten scholarly research and/or clinical application?

Anderson placed an emphasis upon the vigor that postmodernism adds to the profession rather than any diminishment of scholarly research. At the same time, she also recognized the need for "some consensus on a definition" in order to effectively communicate with one's colleagues. Gergen suggested that abandoning the modernist quest for a "singular, rationally coherent, fully justified position" as a basis for research and practice will lend vitality to the profession. Mahoney compared constructivism to Darwinian theory in its ability "to change in response to its critics and the evidence." This ability to change, Mahoney

anticipated, will be "one of the strengths of constructivism." On the other hand, Mahoney, like Anderson, recognized the difficulty of engaging and carrying on a dialogue when the conversants are unable to presume the same or similar meaning for a specific word. Neither Anderson nor Gergen felt as if scholarly research and/or clinical applications are threatened by the lack of coherence accompanying postmodern ideas. Mahoney's response viewed the adaptability of constructivism as a strength rather than a threat to research and practice.

Presuming there are versions of postmodernism, or at least different emphases that can be attributed to the major representatives, do you believe versions or emphases exist that are incongruent with the practice of therapy?

Anderson said that the "particular postmodern emphasis and how it is used with regard to therapy" determines whether or not it is incongruent with the practice of therapy. Anderson also pointed out how a person positions him or herself with regard to the particular postmodern concept will affect congruency. For example, she provided the example "of how the concept of the 'reflecting process' or 'reflecting team' has come, for some, to be a technique rather than a concept." Consequently, it appeared, for Anderson, that postmodern concepts can be applied in therapy in very *un-postmodern-like* ways. Gergen said that that "there are domains of postmodern critique that are opposed to traditional therapeutic practices." He continued by saying that "there are various critics who ally the therapeutic establishment with modernism, and its ideology of individualism, support of narcissism, scientism, colonialism, status quoism, classism, and so on." His comment described therapeutics practices that may be either traditional or reflective of the postmodern critique. Rather than specific ideas, Gergen said that there are postmodern domains that are opposed to

traditional therapeutic approaches. Mahoney implied that "there are limitations on what people can construct at any given point in time." Therefore, any construction that would go "too far" in either a positive or negative direction would not be appropriate.

How would you define postmodernism?

Anderson said:

> Broadly speaking, postmodern is an umbrella term that refers to a diverse body of literature that shares a commonality—a critique and question of the essentialist social and cultural traditions of knowledge as out of sync with and inadequate to understanding our fast changing contemporary world. Specifically, postmodern theories/philosophies critique and question searches for a foundation of knowledge, claims for universal/overarching truths, and known certainty. Postmodernism proposes an alternative view that knowledge is dynamic, locally based, and its reality cannot be known.

Gergen said he views "postmodernism as a cultural transformation." Yet within "the scholarly world," Gergen stated:

> it is most useful to view postmodernism as an extended, dynamic and continuous array of deliberations concerned with our changing conditions. These deliberations are marked by a deep suspicion - if not outright criticism - of the societal conditions of the past century and their roots in the Enlightenment, but simultaneously struggling toward developing alternative departures.

Mahoney says that the emergence of postmodernism reflects developments that transcend traditional academic disciplines and describe planetary life in the post decade of the

twentieth century. Mahoney points out that economic, political, and technological factors are dramatically challenging identities and traditional ways of life which, in turn, is contributing to an emerging postmodern worldview or philosophical perspective that acknowledges the complexity, relativity, and intersubjectivity of all human experience. Additionally, Mahoney says that features of postmodernism would include the lack of an absolute foundation for human belief systems, the absence of an essentialized self and a view of science as an interpretative endeavor.

Definitional aspects of postmodernism shared by all respondents include the idea of postmodernism emerging as a consequence of changing social and cultural conditions. For Anderson and Gergen, postmodernism is seen as prescriptive, that is, it "*proposes an alternative*" (Anderson) or is "*struggling toward developing alternative departures*" (Gergen). For Mahoney, postmodernism appears to be more descriptive, it represents a worldview or philosophical perspective and reflects developments in the twentieth century. Anderson, Gergen, and Mahoney also share similarities when postmodernism is viewed as dynamic and continuous deliberation and critique of social conditions.

Do you recognize versions of postmodernism?

Both Anderson and Gergen said independent of one another, "there are many versions" of postmodernism. Gergen also said that these versions do not fall into "an easily classifiable set of schools." Discussions informed by postmodern ideas appear across a range of scholarly domains. Mahoney on the other hand tends "to think of postmodernism as potentially having two major spins to it." The first spin is "more constructive and positive" with an emphasis on possibilities and questioning. A second major spin that Mahoney finds in

postmodernism is "deconstructionism" which tends to be "more negative." Each contributor affirmed a recognition of versions of postmodernism.

How would you distinguish between postmodernism and social constructionism?

Anderson said, in her view, "social constructionism is one form/version/direction of postmodernism." She suggested that social constructionism focuses upon the social rather than the individual and seeks to understand knowledge as a social process, created within systems of meaning. Gergen also viewed social constructionism as a movement "within the more general postmodern shift of the academy and the society." At the same time, Gergen suggested that social constructionism moves past the postmodern critique of modernism which allows it to avoid "nihilism, relativism, and political lassitude" which are characteristic of critiques of modernist foundationalism.

Mahoney uses the term social constructivism rather than social constructionism. He distinguished between the two by making the suggestion that constructivism may be considered as a broader term that encompasses social constructionism as well as other varieties of constructivism, i.e., radical and critical. Constructionism, said Mahoney, differs from constructivism in the measure that it reflects a "much needed emphasis on other social and symbolic contexts in which all meanings are constructed."

With regard to constructivism and postmodernism, Mahoney said constructivism is a reflection of postmodernism but qualified this distinction by saying that his understandings of these concepts are temporal and linked to specific persons and quotes. Consequently, Mahoney has no general definition of postmodernism that would apply in all instances.

Would you identify any particular factors that may contribute to the continued criticism of postmodernist and social constructionist or social constructivist perspectives in the literature?

Anderson pointed to several reasons why criticism of postmodernism continues. To begin with, she said, "Anything that challenges, or appears to challenge, traditions and the familiar is often greeted with skepticism, negativity, and discounting." Furthermore, she suggested that misunderstandings about postmodernism and therapeutic approaches that utilize its principles abound. Particularly, critics often think that a therapy utilizing postmodern ideas means that the client takes over therapy. It does not. Nevertheless, this idea has contributed to "the 'anything goes' myth." Anderson also said that critics of her postmodern approach to therapy repeatedly misunderstand her concept of 'not-knowing' by erroneously concluding that it must mean that the therapist does not have any expertise. Gergen, likewise, suggested that much of the continued criticism of postmodernism is "based on misreadings, highly selective readings, or ignorance." For example, Gergen said critics will often "presume that constructionist suppositions constitute truth posits." The critic said Gergen, takes constructionism "to task for obliterating this or that favored reality or ethic." Yet a close reading of constructionism "reveals that it does not obliterate any tradition." Constructionism, he said, "is not intended as a final philosophy." Mahoney also listed several reasons for the continued criticism of postmodernism. First he said, "they're becoming more popular." Second, "they're beginning to challenge a very invested and empowered group who are not particularly eager to lose their investments or their empowerment." Finally, Mahoney suggested that postmodern literature is written so obtusely that "it's very difficult to understand."

Each respondent suggested that postmodern is misunderstood or difficult to understand. Both Anderson and Mahoney pointed out that postmodernism challenges the familiar, traditional, or invested. While Anderson and Mahoney acknowledged a threat to the received view, Gergen implied that constructionism ought not be considered a threat to any tradition.

What aspects of postmodernism or features of postmodernism are applied or manifested in your work?

Anderson said that the postmodern assumptions present in her work are described in her book, *Conversation, language, and possibilities: A postmodern approach to therapy* (1997). Additional emphases would include multiple voices, diversity, and collaboration. Anderson also pointed out that while she emphasizes the importance of the local conversation, it is an emphasis that is attentive to the larger cultural and social discourses in which the local is embedded. Aspects or features of postmodernism identified by Gergen include: anti-foundationalism and pro eclecticism; anti-individualism and pro relationalism; anti-scientism and pro multiple knowledges; anti-naturalism and pro culturalism; anti-status quoism and pro future construction; anti-ethicalism and pro ethical deliberation; and anti-realism and pro dialogism. Aspects or features of postmodernism in Mahoney's work include a recognition of the complexity, relativity, and intersubjectivity of human experience. Additionally, Mahoney affirmed the lack of an essentialized self, a suspicion of dominant practices and ideologies, and constructive possibilities.

Similarities shared by each of the contributors include an emphasis on diversity, constructive possibilities, and recognition of larger social and cultural discourses. An

additional similarity is the emphasis upon the constructive postmodern characteristic versus the deconstructive characteristic.

Discussion

Postmodernism and 'anything goes?'

Anderson, Gergen and Mahoney, three notable contributors within the field of therapy, said that their use of postmodern ideas is not the equivalent of meaning 'anything goes.' These contributors embrace postmodernist ideas while simultaneously affirming that there will always be constraints and limitations. Although Mahoney believes that "there are limitations on what people can construct at any given point in time," he recognizes that a particular spin of postmodernism—deconstructionism—can lead to nihilism and narcissism. This comment by Mahoney, as well as comments by Anderson and Gergen, point to their recognition that postmodernism exists in a variety of forms. Consequently, when Doherty (1991) said that the overemphasis of language and conversational narrative in postmodern family therapy risks "reducing patterns of behavior like physical abuse and incest to nothing more than the subjective and equivalent 'stories' of the participants" (p 42), a reader may wonder if, at the time of his article, Doherty viewed postmodernism as essentially assuming a single unified expression. On the other hand, if Doherty recognized multiple versions, then a reader may wonder which expression of postmodernism Doherty, as well as other critics, had in mind when taking postmodernism to task for promoting a laissez faire attitude. Of course, this bane of non-specificity regarding comments referencing postmodern thought extends to advocates as well as critics. Consider the following instance where Zimmerman and Dickerson (1993) said in the abstract of their article, "Using ideas from postmodernism thought, a process of

therapy is described in which couples are 'separated' from the reciprocal patterns which have become restraining and are currently affecting the relationship." This is only instance where the authors used the word 'postmodernism.' While Zimmerman and Dickerson speak of their work as being influenced by "social constructionism, narrative, second-order cybernetics, and Michael White's ideas" (p. 403), no further effort is made toward describing which part of their therapeutic process possesses characteristics that are uniquely postmodern.

Towards addressing whether or not postmodernism promotes an attitude of 'anything goes,' this inquiry demonstrates that postmodern ideas as used by Harlene Anderson, Kenneth Gergen, and Michael Mahoney do not encourage such an attitude. Neither would this laissez faire attitude be an appropriate description of a postmodern influence upon scholarly research. According to these respondents, the implication that a postmodern influence may lead to a diminution of academic standards is unwarranted. Having said this, it should be pointed out that both Anderson and Mahoney do recognize the difficulty of engaging in scholarly conversation where participants are burdened by the ambiguous meaning of shared words. Yet despite this ambiguity, Anderson and Gergen suggest that the polyvocality of postmodernism ought to add vigor and vitality to research and practice. Similarly, Mahoney said that the ability to evolve and change in response to critics and new understandings is "one of the strengths of constructivism." Gergen's position, however, was nuanced when he acknowledged a possible threat if it is assumed that the only acceptable research is modernist research, that is, the insistence upon "a singular, rationally coherent, fully justified position."

If postmodernism, according to these respondents neither encourages an attitude of 'anything goes,' nor threatens scholarly research, then what constrains its' anti-foundational

posture? Each respondent acknowledged that constraints will accompany any theory. Gergen, for instance, said that a theory will be constrained by its own ontology. In other words, a theory will be constrained by what it purports to model and predict. Anderson answered this questions by clarifying what it means to say 'anti-foundational.' Her theoretical approach is anti-foundational is the sense that it is "always open to review, critique, change, and deletion." While Anderson suggested that all theories have a foundation, she preferred not to use the word 'foundation' as a description of her thought because its typical meaning, i.e., fixed or stable, does not fit her work. Mahoney indicated that theoretical approaches that are anti-foundational or anti-authoritarian (words that Mahoney views as synonymous) will be constrained by "the creativity of the participants" and "a wise sense of timing." Mahoney also suggested that any approach that advocates change or re-organization must do so in a manner that does not lose coherence. To lose coherence and create sustained disorganization would be a failure of efforts for re-organization.

Definitions of postmodernism and related concepts

Among the respondents, there appeared to be a general consensus regarding postmodern ideas understood in the broadest sense. For instance, postmodernism is seen as having emerged as a consequence of social and cultural changes occurring in contemporary times. These ideas have taken the form of dynamic and continuous deliberations and critiques of social conditions. Yet beyond deliberations and critiques are versions or movements within postmodernism that seek alternative views and departure points for issues relating to knowledge, truth, and language as they concern changes in social and cultural conditions.

Each respondent affirmed that he or she recognized different versions of postmodernism. Gergen suggested that these versions, each having different expressions within a particular academic or social domain, resist easy classification. Mahoney suggested that he tends to view postmodernism as possessing two major spins—constructive and deconstructive. Where the constructive spin emphasizes possibilities and resists appeals to dogmatic authority, the deconstructive spin is negative and subversive. The respondents appear to open to the idea that versions of postmodernism may exist that may be incongruent with the practice of therapy. To respond in greater detail would require greater specificity regarding a particular version of postmodernism.

With regard to the relationship of postmodernism and social constructionism, both Anderson and Gergen said that social constructionism exists as a form or version or movement within postmodernism. For Anderson, postmodernism is an umbrella term that would include concepts belonging to social constructionism. Anderson sees social constructionism as being devoted to understanding knowledge that is created within systems of meanings and as part of a social process. The emphasis of social constructionism is upon the social. Gergen, likewise, identified social constructionism as a movement that is playing a role in a postmodern shift occurring in the academy and society. This role appears to be broader than the role of social constructionism as social criticism which casts doubt upon taken-for-granted assumptions. However, simply limiting one's view of social constructionism as casting doubt upon social and cultural assumptions removes it from the larger movement that Gergen said extends past "nihilism, relativism, and political lassitude." This distinction is useful in the measure that it reveals how readers of social constructionism could come to the

conclusion that social constructionism intends towards nihilism. By distinguishing roles or nuances of social constructionism, one is provided a broader scope of understandings that explains how readers may arrive at different conclusions regarding its meaning and utility. It appears that social constructionism, like postmodernism, is burdened by multiple meanings. Therefore, in the most general terms, social constructionism exists as a movement within a broader postmodern shift that seeks to place primary emphasis upon social relatedness. Yet, it bears remembering that social constructionism also possesses multiple forms and, consequently, multiple understandings.

Mahoney identified himself as a constructivist, specifically a critical constructivist. He distinguished between social constructivism and social constructionism by suggesting that constructionism reflects a "much needed emphasis on other social and symbolic contexts in which all meanings are constructed." Mahoney suggested that constructivism could be considered as a broader term that encompasses constructionism as well as other varieties of constructivism, i.e., radical and critical.

Both Anderson and Mahoney described social constructionism as emphasizing the social rather than the individual. Although Gergen did not explicitly say this in his response, he does say that the focus of constructionism is upon patterns of relationship in the midst of diversity. Consequently, all the respondents view social constructionism as placing primary emphasis upon the social dimensions instead of the individual ones.

This emphasis upon the social may be a means of distinguishing constructivism from constructionism. For instance, when Mahoney talks about social constructivism, he speaks about characteristics generally belonging to individuals. For example, Mahoney describes

people as being proactive in their own perception and knowing, possessing tacit levels of awareness, and tending to favor maintaining experiential patterns rather that modifying them. Gergen, on the other hand, focuses upon social relatedness rather than the characteristics of individuals. This distinction may be useful as an initial means of delineating between constructivism and constructionism.

Continued criticism of postmodernism

Unfortunately, postmodernism's scope of use and often oblique meanings contribute to misunderstandings—a problem identified by each of the respondents. Moreover, as Anderson and Mahoney pointed out, frequently when a new idea is introduced that challenges a dominant or received view, resistance can be anticipated. In the measure that postmodernism challenges a familiar or traditional perspective, one can expect criticism from the established positions. Anderson also suggested that critics are uncomfortable with the uncertainty that accompanies postmodern ideas. From Gergen's perspective, much of the continued criticism is a consequence of "misreadings, highly selective readings, or ignorance." With regard to constructionism, Gergen finds that critics will often mistakenly view it as a final philosophy or an obliterator of traditions. Gergen said that it does neither.

Features of postmodernism in the work of the contributors

Features of postmodernism appearing in each of the respondents' work include an emphasis upon knowledge as relative, reality as a construction, the complexity and diversity of human experience, and the possibilities of alternative understandings and meanings that may exist outside of dominant social and cultural practices. These are general characteristics mentioned by the contributors. Gergen commented that his views of postmodernism as a cultural

transformation are most fully developed in *The Saturated Self.* It is reasonable to presume that additional postmodern ideas can be found in the works of each of these respondents. Significant figures mentioned by at least two of the respondents include: Ludwig Wittgenstein, Paul Feyerabend, Peter Burger and Thomas Luckmann, Mikhail Bahktin, Michel Foucault, Rom Harre, and Thomas Kuhn.

Emergent domains

Emergent domains are in contrast to imposed domains which, in the case of this inquiry, are parameters placed upon the data a priori; that is, responses to questions posed by the interviewer. Emergent domains are those themes that are revealed by the data apart from the imposed domains; that is, information spontaneously given by informants. Themes that emerged in this inquiry, separate from the imposed domains, include: the respondent's reliance upon words and metaphors reflecting fluidity or temporality; the feeling among the respondents that postmodernism or the postmodernism represented in their work is misunderstood; and the respondent's firm belief that incoherence can lend vitality to research and practice.

Two themes emerged in the respondent's description of postmodernism—fluidity and temporality. Where fluidity characterizes change from a spatial dimension, temporality refers to change from the dimension of time. Additionally, Anderson and Gergen choose specific words to describe their understandings, while Mahoney relied upon metaphors. In each instance, the idea of non-stasis is quite apparent.

Anderson said that postmodernism views knowledge and language as "dynamic, generative, and relational—the fluidity and instability of meaning." Consistent then with the

dynamic that it seeks to describe, Anderson said, of postmodernism's own definition, "Trying to pin down one meaning of postmodernism would probably be antithetical, if not impossible."

Gergen choice of words point to a fluidity when he spoke of postmodernism as "an extended, dynamic and continuous array of deliberations concerned with our changing condition." Postmodernism is "struggling toward developing alternative departures." Gergen also located this fluidity when he spoke of a "postmodern shift of the academy and the society."

Mahoney, on the other hand, utilized metaphors—metaphors whose central characteristic reflect fluidity and temporality. When asked what constructivism means, a variety of postmodernism for Mahoney, he responded by saying that he felt like someone on the side of a mountain:

> and I'm continuing to move because that's what I like to do and before I shift my weight to my next handhold, I'm going to check it out to see if it is going to support my body because it's eventually probably going to become a foothold and if it won't hold me it's not a good candidate, but I'm not thinking about building a duplex here.

Mahoney, speaking about relativism as an essential feature of postmodernism said:

> And if things are relative, and if our concepts are relative, nailing anything down is ... it's not impossible, but ... the image that just came to me as I said the word is was the scaffolding that carpenters will use when they're putting up a new room or a roof. They will temporarily nail some things up to support the weight of the structure that they're working on before the structures come together in mutual support—the wall

supporting one another and the roof .... So you nail something down with the very conscious intention that it's not going to stay.

Mahoney acknowledged a criticism of constructivism has been the simplification of *the self*, which "is probably a very complex dynamic process." Part of the difficulty, however, in describing complex dynamic processes is having to rely upon symbolic forms which tend to function by fixing things—by stabilizing them linguistically and logically. While this is a strength of symbolic forms, a concomitant weakness is their inability to capture "things that are in movement." Although Mahoney talks about this in the context of a criticism of some constructivists and their treatment of *the self*, his point remains that symbolic forms are found lacking when is comes to re-presenting a complex dynamic process. Not surprisingly, then, that Mahoney would rely, in part, upon metaphors to describe the dynamic suggested by postmodernism.

Interestingly all three respondents used words reflecting a phenomenon in motion to describe postmodernism. The researcher also finds it interesting that both Anderson and Mahoney would use the similar phrases "pin down" and "nail down" in their descriptions.

Another theme to spontaneously emerge separate from the imposed domains is the feeling, particularly by Anderson and Gergen, that postmodernism itself has been misunderstood, or their own ideas, which relate to ideas of postmodernism, have been misunderstood. Additionally, within this particular emergent domain, a sub-theme appears—the respondent's surprise.

Said Anderson; "Misunderstandings about postmodernism and the approaches derived from them abound." "Always amazing how pluralism, multiplicity, and uncertainty are

associated with 'anything goes.'" "What the criticism refers to is a misunderstanding or disagreement with the notion that knowledge and language are dynamic, generative, and relational—the fluidity and instability of meaning." These comments by Anderson demonstrate her belief that postmodernism is frequently misunderstood. Her comment beginning with, "Always amazing ...." reflects her on-going surprise that such misunderstandings continue.

Gergen also seems to believe that postmodernism is misunderstood although he does not say it so directly. Rather, responding to a question regarding continued criticism of postmodernism, Gergen said, "Much of it is based on misreadings, highly selective readings, or ignorance" This researcher views a misreading as synonymous with a misunderstanding. With regard to the theme of surprise, a comment by Gergen seems to suggest it. Specifically, it seems that the question suggesting that postmodernism may promote an attitude of anything goes, catches Gergen by surprise. He responded, " ...virtually no one within these dialogues has ever advocated, to my knowledge, a position of anything goes."

Mahoney does not use the word 'misunderstood,' but he does claim that much of postmodern literature is "very difficult to understand" as a consequence of being "written so obtusely." One may conclude that Mahoney would concur that postmodernism is therefore misunderstood as a consequence of being so dense and impenetrable.

The feeling of being misunderstood, for Anderson, also extended past postmodernism in general to her own specific ideas. Said Anderson, "Most often misunderstood is the client's voice taking center stage, appearing to have the client take over the therapy, associated with the 'anything goes' myth, and the therapist not having any expertise (a misunderstanding of the concept of non-knowing). "I am especially puzzled by someone who writes a critique

critical of the work and uses only one reference—and a ten year old reference at that—when I have written over fifty articles in the time since."

Whether misunderstandings of postmodernism originate as a consequence of a misreading, a disagreement, ignorance or trying to extend or generalize a concept past what is intended, one might wonder, based upon the comments made by these respondents, the extent to which criticism has been and continues to be predicated upon misunderstandings. Anderson clearly feels misunderstood. It would appear that more than once someone mistakenly associated her collaborative systems approach "with the 'anything goes' myth." At least one critic, in a series of articles relating to postmodernism and narrative therapy, has admitted to failing to make appropriate distinctions. Said Minuchen (1999), "To begin with, I lumped together different perspectives on postmodernity, as Harlene Anderson correctly pointed out, and a reading of the four responses shows how different these colleagues are from one another in their theoretical viewpoints and clinical practice" (p. 9).

Another theme that emerged spontaneously from the respondents was a level of excitement that seemed to extend past simply answering one of the questions. The question the participants were asked to respond to was, "In what ways, if at all, does a lack of coherence with regard to the meaning and use of postmodernism in the literature threaten scholarly research and/or clinical practice?" The participants each responded by saying that scholarly research was not in jeopardy—the imposed domain. On the other hand, what seemed to emerge spontaneously was an attitude, at once hopeful and confident, that some incoherence will revitalize and reinvigorate research and practice. Said Anderson, "I think it adds some vigor to our profession—the lack of coherence, so to speak, is what

postmodernism is all about." Gergen suggested that if one were to abandon the modernist quest for a "singular, rationally coherent, fully justified position" as the basis for research and practice, "then the incoherence is indeed what lends vitality." Mahoney viewed the lack of a singular, consistent definition for postmodernism, which relates to the notion of a lack of coherence, as a strength. Mahoney likens constructivism to Darwinian theory in its ability to evolve and change. Rather than seeing this as a weakness, Mahoney views it as a sign of robustness and strength.

Conclusion

This inquiry is a modest effort to address criticism found in family therapy literature that postmodernism promotes an attitude of 'anything goes.' What can be concluded from this effort is that three notable voices within the therapeutic profession and whose comments are referenced in peer-journals have said that their use of postmodern ideas does not encourage an 'anything goes' attitude. Of course it would not be accurate to conclude, on the basis of these responses, that all therapists whose work is informed by postmodern ideas utilize these ideas in the same way or even utilize the same ones. Indeed, postmodern ideas span a very broad range of notions from truth to knowledge to emancipation. What can be concluded is that Anderson, Gergen, and Mahoney are neither using nor viewing postmodern thought as a means to support a type of unscholarly, uninformed or haphazard therapy that is implied by the descriptive phrase 'anything goes.'

It would be difficult to speak of postmodern thought without speaking of nuanced positions and ideas. As a consequence, discussions revolving around postmodernism will continue to be nuanced and complicated. Attention to detail will be required to avoid

confusion. It would be appropriate for contributors and critics, and a benefit to our field, to seek greater specificity through carefully delineated positions regarding postmodern ideas and characteristics in order to bring clarity to these discussions. Furthermore, the insistence upon clarity ought not mean a restriction of voices, diminution of ideas, or a homogenization of perspectives. Rather, it would simply discourage broad sweeping statements by both advocates as well as critics that foster greater confusion.

Appendix

Responses from Harlene Anderson

How would you define postmodernism?

Broadly speaking, postmodern is an umbrella term that refers to a diverse body of literature that share a commonality—a critique and question of the essentialist social and cultural traditions of knowledge as out of sync with and inadequate to understanding our fast changing contemporary world. Specifically, postmodern theories/philosophies critique and question searches for a foundation of knowledge, claims for universal/overarching truths, and known certainty. Postmodernism proposes an alternative view that knowledge is dynamic, locally based, and its reality cannot be known.

Central to these propositions about knowledge is language—including all forms of spoken and unspoken language. Postmodern theories replace the notion of language as mirroring what it describes, and therefore being representational with the notion of language as gaining its meaning through its use, and therefore being generative and performative.

Are there different versions of postmodernism that you recognize?

There are many versions of postmodernism—I would acknowledge Heidegger—the break with modernism can be traced back to the works of Toynbee who termed the "post-Modern age." Also, Peter Drucker, C. Wright Mills. See Postmodern Theory, Best & Kellner, 1991.

How would you distinguish between postmodernism and social constructionism?

I would emphasize, in my view, that social constructionism is one form/version/direction of postmodernism. Social constructionism is devoted to understanding knowledge as created within systems of meaning and as a social/communal process—focusing on the social rather than the individual, focusing on relational accounts of knowledge, power, identities, ethics, etc..

How would you respond to the criticism that postmodernism may promote an attitude of 'anything goes?'

Always amazing how pluralism, multiplicity, and uncertainty are associated with 'anything goes.' Any truth, any reality, any meaning can be as valid as another. What the criticism refers to is a misunderstanding or disagreement with the notion that knowledge and language is dynamic, generative, and relational—the fluidity and instability of meaning.

What constrains a theoretical approach that is antifoundational?

Antifoundational is a description. All theories have a foundation. postmodernism theories simply critique and question the notion of foundation as a single view that is deemed correct, or the most correct, based on true and objective understanding. This critiquing and questioning is itself part of the foundation of postmodernism; letting go of searches for foundations of truth and knowledge. But postmodernism does not think of foundation as a

bottom from which to build or which the top is built upon. The search is replaced with the notion that all forms of truth and knowledge are historically, culturally, and linguistically embedded. Foundation is not a word that fits my work because of the sense in which the word is used. Think of all of the courses in the "foundations of family therapy." So, yes my work is antifoundational in the sense that you describe—anti modern foundations. Assumptions on which my work is based are thought of "as in motion," always open to review, critique, change, and deletion.

Presuming there are versions of postmodernism, or at least different emphases that can be attributed to some major representatives, do you believe versions or emphases exist that are incongruent with the practice of therapy?

It depends on the particular postmodern emphasis and how it is used with regard to therapy. In this view, it is not as much the version or emphasis but how one thinks about it and positions oneself vis-à-vis it. To be more specific, think of how the concept of "reflecting process" or "reflecting team" has come, for some, to be a technique rather than a concept.

How would you describe the responses to the criticism of postmodernism found in the family therapy literature?

Anything that challenges, or appears to challenge, traditions and the familiar is often greeted with skepticism, negativity, and discounting. I have no problem with someone disagreeing with me. I do have a problem with someone telling me how I think particularly when their description in no way has a fit for me. Misunderstandings about postmodernism and the therapy approaches derived from them abound.

I am especially puzzled by someone who writes a critique critical of the work and uses only one reference—and a ten year old reference at that—when I have written over fifty articles in the time since.

Most often misunderstood is the client's voice taking center stage, appearing to have the client take over the therapy, associated with the 'anything goes' myth, and the therapist not have any expertise (a misunderstanding of the concept of not-knowing).

Would you describe the postmodern emphases or features of postmodernism that are present in your work?

My postmodern philosophical assumptions can be found, most recently, in Conversation, language, and possibilities: A postmodern approach to therapy (1997). Beyond individual assumptions, these principles come together to form a philosophical stance informing my therapy. Additional emphases include multiple voices, diversity, and collaborative relationships. While I also emphasize the importance of the local conversation, it is the local conversation as embedded within larger cultural and social discourses.

Who would be the significant figures that you would identify as influencing your own ideas of postmodernism and/or social constructionism?

Ludwig Wittgenstein, Ken Gergen, Lynn Hoffman, Rom Harre, Peter Drucker, John Shotter, P. L. Berger and T. Luckman, L. S. Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner, Nelson Goodman, Donald Polkinghorne, Theodore Sarbin, Clifford Geertz, Charles Taylor, Mikhail Bakhtin, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and Richard Rorty. I also like what people in other disciplines have to say. I am also influenced by people who write about their experience about writing—poets and playwrights.

Would you identify any particular factors that may contribute to the continued criticism of postmodern and social construction perspectives in the literature?

Uncertainty. Being uncomfortable with uncertainty.

In what ways, if at all, does the lack of coherence with regard to the meaning and use of postmodernism in the professional literature threaten scholarly research and/or clinical application?

Trying to pin down one meaning or definition of postmodernism would probably be antithetical, if not impossible. Although, to speak with one's colleagues, there needs to be some consensus on a definition of the premise that you are talking about. This is where things get stuck. With opposing viewpoints, it is often impossible to arrive at a consensus about what you are talking about—this does not mean agreeing with the premises.

I think it adds some vigor to our profession—the lack of coherence, so to speak, is what postmodern is about. Uniqueness, doing what the occasion calls for, individually tailoring, not across-the-board answers.

Responses from Kenneth Gergen

How would you define postmodernism?

My views of postmodernism as a cultural transformation are most fully developed in *The Saturated Self.* In terms of the scholarly world, however, I think it is most useful to view postmodernism as an extended, dynamic and continuous array of deliberations concerned with our changing condition. These deliberations are marked by a deep suspicion - if not outright criticism - of the societal conditions of the past century and their roots in the Enlightenment, but simultaneously struggling toward developing alternative departures.

Do you recognize versions of postmodernism?

There are many versions, but I don't see these as forming an easily classifiable set of schools. One can differentiate among specific forms of debate to be found in literary, sociological, feminist, neo-Marxist, political theory, and social studies of technology domains, for example, but they overlap and also carry traces of dialogue in many other domains.

How would you distinguish between postmodernism and social constructionism?

As I see it social constructionism is a movement (scholarly/practical/cultural) that plays a major role within the more general postmodern shift of the academy and the society. However, this role is an enormously important one, in my view, because it moves beyond the critique of modernism. It allows us to escape the nihilism, relativism, and political lassitude that are often invited by the critiques of modernist foundationalism alone.

How would you respond to the criticism that postmodernism may promote an attitude of anything goes?

The postmodern dialogues are critical of any foundational constraints over human action, and thus invite an enormous liberation. However, virtually no one within these dialogues has ever advocated, to my knowledge, a position of anything goes. There are always constraints; scholars vary however in the way they characterize their form, significance, durability, and the like.

What constrains a theoretical approach that is antifoundational?

Any anti-foundational argument already builds in the constraints of its own theorizing. In its critique, it already presumes an ontology and an ethic.

Presuming there are versions of postmodernism, or at least different emphases that can be attributed to the major representatives, do you believe versions or emphases exist that are incongruent with the practice of therapy?

There are domains of postmodern critique that are opposed to traditional therapeutic practices. For example, there are various critics who ally the therapeutic establishment with modernism, and its ideology of individualism, support of narcissism, scientism, colonialism, status quoism, classism, and so on.

How would you describe the responses to the criticism of postmodernism found in the professional literature?

They are quite varied: sometimes hostile or derisive, at others quite rational or even pedantic, and at still other charitable and dialogic.

Would you describe the features or emphases of postmodernism that are reflected prominently in your work?

anti-foundationalism and pro-eclecticism

anti-individualism and pro relationalism

anti-scientism and pro multiple knowledges

anti-naturalism and pro culturalism

anti-status quoism and pro future construction

anti-Ethicalism and pro ethical deliberation

anti-realism and pro dialogism

Who are those figures that you would identify as most influencing your own ideas of postmodernism or social constructionism?

The cast has changed over time as my ideas have developed, but among the most visible of my private interlocutors over time are Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Kuhn, Feyerabend, Latour, Foucault, Rorty, Derrida, Baudrillard, Bakhtin, and Burger and Luckmann. Also invaluable have been conversations with Charles Taylor, Steve Tyler, Shotter, Goolishian, Anderson, Harre, Lutz, McClosky, McNamee, Penn, Smedslund, and naturally my wife Mary. There are important others, but pages would be required to acknowledge them all.

Would you identify any factors that may be contributing to the continued criticism of postmodern and/or social constructionism in the professional literature?

Much of it is based on misreadings, highly selective readings, or ignorance. One of the most prominent problems in critiques of constructionism is the tendency to presume that constructionist suppositions constitute truth posits. In effect, the critic simply folds constructionism back into the modernist frame, and then takes it to task for obliterating this or that favored reality or ethic. A close reading of constructionism, however, will reveal that is does not obliterate any tradition. It is not intended as a final philosophy.

In what ways, if at all, does a lack of coherence with regard to the meaning and use of postmodernism in the literature threaten scholarly research and/or clinical practice?

Perhaps the major hindrance revolves around the residual modernist desire for coherence. So long as the singular, rationally coherent, fully justified position is required as a basis for research and practice, then the polyvocality of postmodernism will remain a threat. If you abandon this modernist quest, then the incoherence is indeed what lends vitality.

Interview with Michael Mahoney

M: Okay, the definition postmodernism that is here[4] is probably as good as I could come up with on the moment. So ...

J: That's fine. That's absolutely fine. There's no sense reinventing the wheel.

M: Huh?

J: I said there's no sense reinventing the wheel.

M: Yea, I think that with this pick up the mike, and not holding it or if it's like that? You think so?

J: *

M: Somehow when I'm in this mode it feels

J: *

M: 1,2,3 testing, 1,2,3. Um, I mean my first inclination on definition of postmodernism is the historical context, um, Walt Weimer really shaped me out of using the word modern because it had become so ambiguous as to what modernity is and anticipation of one of the later questions, I think Alan Weil's book on the end of modernity is something on the shelf

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[4] Dr. Mahoney, at the time of the interview, did not have the questions provided him on an earlier occasion. Consequently, he looked at the interviewer's questions which had the following reference:
Neimeyer and Mahoney (1995) refer to postmodernism as a worldview or philosophical perspective "that acknowledges the complexity, relativity, and intersubjectivity of all human experience" (p. 407). Features of postmodernism include the lack of an absolute foundation for human belief systems, the absence of an essentialized self and a view of science as an interpretative endeavor. Additionally, postmodernism judges "the adequacy of a position in part by whether it yields a useful critique of unquestioned dominant practices and ideologies" (1995, p. 407). Neimeyer and Mahoney (1995) point out that the emergence of postmodernism, as well as postrationalism, reflect "developments that transcend philosophy and the academic disciplines; they are reflections of planetary life in the post decade of the twentieth century" (p. 40). They suggest that among the factors contributing to these developments are "the phenomenon of globalization in communication, travel, technology, economics, and political ideology [which] has dramatically challenged identities and the ethical norms associated with nationalities, races, cultures, religions, physical abilities, age, and lifestyles" (1995, p. 394). The magnitude of these emerging changes represent a third axial shift emphasizing "the relativity of all absolutes" (1991, p. 95).

behind me something that helped clarify for me. I see or I associate modernism with post scientific revolution, post industrial revolution and in most respects, I'm associating to Richard Tarnas, *Passions of the Western Mind* and Ken Wilber's work but I think modernism at least as it has been criticized tends to be associated with a very idealistic view of progress and progress as inevitable and predictable and controllable and that technology which is the child of science will be the savior leading to sort of a Utopian world. And there's a little bit of blending together here of utopianism and rationalism in the sense that Hayek and Weimer use it. Sort of the Hayek's last book was called the *Fatal Conceit* and it really comes back to this notion that we know and that we can rationally both understand and predict and program for things. So if modernism is this almost evangelical belief in progress and progress is our most important product kind of line, I see postmodernism as being a multifaceted reaction that emerged out of linguistics, out of reactions to structuralism (which got to be labeled post structuralism), out of literary theory and literary criticism, certainly out of Herman Hudik's. So deconstructionism becomes an element here and I mean I come back to my favorite saying which we still haven't been able to trace to Shopenhauer directly but it sounds like something he would have said which is that there are two kinds of people in the world—those who believe there are two kinds of people in the world and those who don't. And I continue to find that koan very productive because I catch myself again and again and again in making distinctions and Hayek's '52 book, *The Sensory Order*, is about the nervous system being a system of classification. That's how we distinguish between a novel stimulus and a familiar stimulus and how we orient and so on and I don't think we can get, well, I will genuflect here to my Buddhist friends, maybe with years and years of medication, one can achi ...., I don't

know. Maybe there are non-dichotomized, non-categorical processes of consciousness that are possible. A unity of consciousness. I'm open to that possibility. I wouldn't presume to say to say that I've even glimpsed it experientially. But maybe that's possible but I think that for me and for many people just being aware of the distinctions is a major step so when I respond to the question about kinds of postmodernism I move into an inclination that I've had for the last 18 months, maybe, to think of postmodernism as potentially having two major spins to it. One being a more constructive and positive spin with an emphasis on possibility and an emphasis on questioning. Never ending the dialogue with, "Because I said so," or "I know that's true," and deconstructionism which although not necessarily tends to have a more negative spin to it. In ..certainly in the deconstruction of texts in Herman Hudiks and literary criticism where nothing has a meaning separate from the context not only of the text but of also the speaker, the writer, the author and the reader, a positionality which is a term that the feminists use and I think quite appropriately, that that every experience reflects a position in space and time and culture and connections to other people and symbol systems. And this distinction between constructive and deconstructive or deconstructionists, varieties of postmodernism. I have an association here with with a walk with Sophie Freud where she was, we were in the woods near Walton Pond and she said she had taken a course if botany and she still didn't know which leaves were to what and I mentioned that I am fascinated in astronomy and had read books and taken courses and I still don't have a grasp or don't feel like I do and she decided that one of the metaphors she uses is hooks like you'd have a coat hook, a coat rack, excuse me, something inside the door to hang something on and that what students need when they're entering a new area is something to hang it on. It may not turn out

to be the best thing to hang it on eventually but and by the way this this metaphor another version of this has occurred to me about whatever constructivism is and that is that when people have challenged me what does constructivism mean, I've had some humorous experiences where people in very challenging kind of way have said are you developing a new paradigm here, a new school of thought and so on and my response has been I feel like someone on the side of a mountain and I'm continuing to move because that's what I like to do and before I shift my weight to my next handhold, I'm going to check it out to see if it is going to support my body because it's eventually probably going to become a foothold and if it won't hold me it's not a good candidate, but I'm not thinking about building a duplex here. You know, I'm not checking the foundations for a ... you know ... a permanent settlement. And so this either hook or handhold of distinguishing constructivists and deconstructionists, varieties of postmodernism works for me now and I also hang my concepts on quotes, on phrases from people that that really resonate emotionally as well as intellectually for me. And one of my favorites of the last few months is from Ken Wilber in the book - what is it called? It's on the integration of science and religion and it's called *Science*, I think it's called *Science in Spirit*, I've forgot the technical reference but any way there's a line in there where and he sort of hints at this same handhold, ah, he says there are some aspects of constructivism that get carried away but he describes a deconstructionism as that form of postmodernism which represents the tag team from Hell, nihilism and narcissism. And it's a beautiful, metaphor, I mean the tag team from Hell, I love that line. But this notion that nothing matters, anything is as good as anything else, any position goes and so you might as well watch your own ass. You might as well look out for your own interests, etc., the narcissistic version of that. When I think of, you

know, deconstructionism can be used as a tool to take apart any argument and that this reminds me of Bill, William Warren Bartley's *The Retreat to Commitment*, which to me was a mind-blowing book in the late 70's, no, I probably read it '74, '73 or '74 thanks to Walt Weimer and this is Bartley's, Bartley was probably the heir apparent Poppers roll as the leader of critical philosophy, Imre Lakatos who is also a Popper student, died suddenly stepping out of a taxi cab in London, slipped on the pavement in the rain, hit his head and was dead in a matter of hours and so Bartley became the next apparent person to inherent Popperian tradition and in most Bartley never claimed this, he was very modest and very respective of Popper but Bartley really out-Poppered Popper in my reading of him because he in modern lingo would be deconstructed Poppers argument for falsificationism and Popper's argument for any authoritarian form of rationality and Popper introduced something called critically comprehensive rationalism, CCR which is not Credence Clearwater Revival for those of us who remember them, in which his statement was that one should comprehensively and continually question any claims to knowledge including this one. So it was the first epistemology in its own foundational statement to state its own fallibility and therefore to be self-consistent. Because logical positivism and falsificationism by their own criteria didn't make sense. Logical positivism couldn't point to a potentially verifiable test of its own rationality and falsification couldn't point to a potentially falsifiable test of its rationality and in the dialogues that emerged after Bartley's publicity of the CCR, one of its critics said well what happens if you apply this to logic? You could say that logic is not fundamentally an authority that leads to knowledge and Bartley's response was That's right. You can, we would now say deconstruct. You can throw out logic but if you throw out logic in the traditional

sense of the term, you throw out dialogue that at least in Aristotelian terms logic presumes some semblance of the law of identity that when you use the same term repeatedly, you're referring to approximately the same thing. And it's very very difficult to carry on a dialogue if you can't make that assumption. Which by the way was leveled at Kuhn for his use of the term paradigm and someone documented 17 different ways or whatever in his book, and it it anticipates this later question about is it a block, you know, is it an impediment to scholarship if postmodernism doesn't have, you know, a definition that can be nailed to the wall like a butterfly, and used consistently. And I think you know some people would say this is the slippery slope of deconstructionism and nonjustificational or nonauthoritarian and I use those synonymously. To me, justificationism is that approach in epistemology that claims an approach can be justified which is to say authorized as more true or better than any other approach. And I think one of the to me one of the essential features of postmodernism is relativism, is the relativity. And if things are relative, and if our concepts are relative, nailing anything down is .. it's not impossible but ... the image that just came to me as I said the word is was the scaffolding that carpenters will use when they're putting up a new room or a roof. They will temporarily nail some things up to support the weight of the structure that they're working on before the structures come together in mutual support—the wall supporting one another and the roof. And that scaffolding comes off later on. So you nail something down with the very conscious intention that it's not going to stay. So our metaphor of nailing things down needs to be a little bit more flexible. And I see on the positive side, that the fact that there may not be a definition that can be encapsulated, you know, and put into the ... what's the museum where they have the measures in Britain?... you know... this is a gram and this is

whatever ... the positive thing for me, in my association here, is to Daniel Dennett, the book *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, about the idea of evolution. And I disagree with some of Dennett's points but the one that I do agree with most poignantly is that the dangerous part of Darwin's idea is that it's organic. That is that Darwinian theory continues to change in response to its critics and the evidence and so Darwin begot not just a theory but an idea capable of changing. And in science, that's a very robust thing. Now the critics can say well it's hard to refute Darwinian theory because it keeps changing. Stephen J. Gould and others keep saying, well yea, but we need to make modifications in this part, given the evidence on this or what we now know about fossil record or whatever, I don't see that as a weakness of Darwinian theory. I see it as a strength. And one of the strengths of constructivism for me is that, unless I've got it real wrong and that's you know very possible, constructivism is going to continue evolving. I'm rambling on here .. but a footnote here is that I didn't like the term constructivism. And in fact Vittorio Guidano and I, both for a number of years, were trying to come up with some other term. And in fact in some of my publications, I talked about nonjustificational process oriented developmental theory or some unwieldy kind of thing like this. And Vittorio still uses, especially in his Italian and Spanish publications, the term post-rationalist theory, very much coming back to Popper and Hayek and Weimer and so on. And it really became a phenomenon of people. I mean, we eventually had no choice. That so much literature had called what we were doing constructivists that and in fact Vittorio is founder of an institute is Buenos Aires and in Santiago Chile, that's called International Institute for Post-Rationalist Cognitive Therapy which in North American, people would have no idea what that

is. Here it would be something about constructivist therapy. So I should pause here and see if I'm going off in directions.

J: No, I think ... I mean you touched on several of those questions.

M: And the thing on constructionism and constructivism. To me I think it's a somatic preference in part. And interestingly, constructionism has a formal meaning in mathematics and economics that it does not have in psychology and the social sciences in general. In mathematics, constructionism refers to, and I'm reconstructing here, but it's it's a theorem that can be formally reconstructed and it actually refers to a rigidity. That constructivism would be in contrast to .. and in economics constructionism has been used in a way parallel to what Hayek called rationalist interventionism. And that was the attempt to make a change in a complex dynamic system based on a rational construction of how it operates and which Hayek was opposed to and which I would be very skeptical of. So in the 70's, late 70's when I was beginning to write about some of these things and incorporate Hayek's stuff into my writing, I had many a dialogue with Walt Weimer about this is not a term to use. It's going to be confused with what's going on in mathematics and economics. My current read is that social constructionism, which I associate with people like Sandra Scarr, Kenneth Gergen, with some of the systems family therapists, tends to be a much-needed emphasis on the social and symbolic context in which all meanings are constructed. In which all dialogues are constructed. Where I have some reservations about what I know of social constructionism are in terms of perhaps going a little further than I feel comfortable in deconstructing the sense of self. Not that I believe that the self is this autonomous esth-essential kind of thing that exists. But I think that the sense of continuity and the sense of personal order which most of us

associate with the sense of self is, if not fundamental, pretty habitual to most of our psychological functioning. And I get into dialogues on some of this with some of my Buddhists friends who talk about the path of no self and the quest for an empty self and what they mean. I think by empty self is a self that's flexible, is a self that remains open. And what they mean by the path of no self is a path of less egoistic attachment. These same individuals do not hesitate to put their name on what they author or to sign checks with that name of the selves that they associate with. So I think, just in a practical sense, the social constructionist deconstruction of self—which I think Kenneth Gergen has done probably more convincingly than anyone else I have read—can be can be spun a little bit too far. And one of my loose associations here is to some of the work that's been done by people at Harvard on mindfulness meditation and stress reduction and so on. And I forget the name of the individual right now, but one of them who is teaching some Buddhist retreats and introduction to Buddhism and so on and was advertising them with titles like the path of no self or seeking the empty self began to recognize that a number of people who showed up for these retreats appeared to be eating disordered, anorectic, or bulimic, or whatever. And began to dialogue with both these people and with other Buddhists who had had some similar experiences. And what came out of some of those dialogues—this is in an edited book that Ken Wilber did on transformational development—what came out of the dialogues was that many of these people who did in fact struggle with patterns of eating dysfunction reported that when they looked inside themselves, they couldn't find a self. And that this these retreats appealed to them because they were already there. They were at the point of no self and I think it was a fellow by the name of Engler who invited a Tibetan monk, a Buddhist to come to psychiatric grand rounds. And they

were having an open dialogue on this and they were interviewing an anorectic woman. And the Tibetan monk and teacher was asking, interview here and then was interviewed by the psychiatrist and psychologists who were consulted and the Tibetan monk said my recommendation is that this woman first developed a sense of self before she pursues a path of emptying or losing that self. And I think it was a very wise thing to say that the path of no self or emptiness comes for most at a developmentally later stage after early ego boundaries and object relations are developed. And so on, so to me social constructionism and whatever I see social constructionism as ...

END OF SIDE A

This may be a friendly suggestion—if there is anything other than friendly dialogue on this distinction—that constructivism might be a more inclusive umbrella term under which social constructionism and other variety ... I think there are varieties of constructivism like radical and critical. And I don't think there is much disagreement. I think that some of the constructivists can be rightfully criticized for getting close to, if not a reification of, the self—a simplification of what is probably a very complex dynamic process that we're not likely to put into our current terminology or concepts in any adequate way. Another Buddhist metaphor here, how do you capture the river and you don't do it in buckets. And to me one of the limitations of language was is also one of its strengths. And I think in Lavern's Coserere here and the philosophy of symbolic forms that symbols tend to function in fixing things, that is, in fixing things in a sense of stabilizing them and linguistically and logically. That's one of their strengths. Experientially it's one of their weaknesses because the symbol does not do well in capturing things that are in movement. I mean this is part of my interest in the poetics and the

need for poetry in psychological theorizing. That poetry comes as close, I think, as we've gotten to symbols and words touching the the moving flesh, if you will of experiencing. And unfortunately the APA publication manual does not encourage that kind of language. So all right. I think I've said something about the anything goes part of post-modernism, I think, is associated with deconstructionism. Although another side to this, and again my love of Heraclitus here and looking at the partitioning of ideas, I think that some constructivism, certainly radical constructivism, may go too far in the other direction, that is, anything goes in the positive sense rather than the negative deconstructionist sense. And I don't think that it is possible to easily reframe just about anything into a positive experience. I do believe in opportunity theory. Sophie, Freud and others endorse this—that every challenge in life is an opportunity to learn to grow, to develop. That does not mean that I would recommend talking to hungry and thirsty people in Kosovo and say look, 'this is a wonderful opportunity for your development.' I don't think you talk to someone who has been raped, victimized or violated by saying, 'look the meaning of this is simply a construction in your head.' I don't think constructions are just in our head in the first place. But I think there are limitations on what people can construct at any given point in time. And this is an issue for me in thinking about and writing about challenges to humanistic psychology which is something I'm working on with my son right now. I had a dialogue once with a futurist who was arguing that human potential is limitless and my response was that I have a very fundamental reaction to the word limitless because it implies that limits are enemies. And that, in fact, part of his argument was that we're limiting ourselves with our ideas. We think that we can't move objects with our minds or change things without ideas or whatever and it's just because we think that that we're

limited. And I use the analogy of an eggshell. That developmentally the shell of an egg is critical as a protective barrier during a period in its development. And if that limit were not there, it wouldn't survive. And I think the metaphor holds for other forms of development. That there are limits. And have a child and one of the first things, the word 'no,'.. you know .. when it comes to warnings about hot things and the street and sharp objects and hurting others, 'no' becomes important. There are limits. I love you but that behavior is not acceptable. It doesn't change my love for you but it's it's a message about life. And you know being a critical constructivist, I do believe that there is furniture in the universe and that if you step out into the street without looking, you're not going, you're going to be an ex-constructivist. So .. so that's on the other side of the anything goes. What constrains a theoretical approach that is antifoundational which is anti-justificational or authoritarian. That's a wonderful question, wonderful question and the things that come to mind, first two things are the creativity of its participants and the second thing was a wise sense of timing. That this reminds me of Thomas Kuhn's reaction to his critics after *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* was published and criticized and criticized and criticized. And he came out with a collection of essays in 1977 called *The Essential Tension* in which he was responding not only to his critics but to people like Paul Feyerabend who wrote a book called *Against Method* in which Feyerabend said literally anything goes—do whatever you want. He used the phrase revolutions in permanence, you know, the ultimate of Abby Hoffman of the 60's, you know, sort of screw the establishment and when the next establishment gets established, screw them too. And Kuhn's' response was that you cannot revolt against nothing. And that he had been misread in the structure of scientific revolutions as if he was portraying the revolutionaries as

the heroes and the traditionalists, the protectors of normal science and the old paradigm as the bad guys. You know the old dogmatic fogies who didn't want to change. And Kuhn's' point about 'the essential tension, which is a term from Heraclitus—the essential tension of opposites—was that you've got to have a balance between what is changing and what is remaining. And if you start changing too rapidly, if your revolution becomes anarchy, you've lost the coherence in the order of the system that's trying to organize itself. And I think that is a key to nonjustificational approach. That we've got to... this by the way was the subject of Don Campbell's APA presidential address when he talked about the wisdom of tradition in biology and I don't know whether it was he mentions religious morals, moral traditions .. and he essentially says let's .. just because the authority of the church has been deconstructed (he doesn't use that verb) let's not rush to throw out the wisdom of traditions that have taught us how to live together peacefully. How how to consider some things sacred and so on. He .. the .. I've been told that the American Psychologists received something like 75 letters most of which were just scathing attacks on Campbell for having presented this presidential address and published this article because he was supposed to be a revolutionary. And here he was saying but we need tradition in the .. you know .. it's just like I come back to developmental metaphors, the toddler and adolescent need to know some clear boundaries. And within the context of those boundaries are given virtually limitless or infinite freedom to explore, to find their path and so on but it's within the context of boundaries that, at a later point in time, may be up for challenge. But for the time being, and this to me is part of my interest in spiritual traditions .. Mircea Eliade's book, *The Sacred and the Profane*, or the perennial philosophy of Aldus Huxley .. that there is a wisdom in spiritual traditions which are now being called

wisdom traditions as a synonym that goes beyond the religious orthodoxy of specific beliefs and so on and I think Houston Smith, Joseph Campbell also but Houston Smith in particular in his writings on world religions does an amazing job of pulling together themes on morality and virtue which he distinguishes a sort of what you shouldn't do and what you should aspire toward that are very enlightening for me especially as someone who was very anti-religious after going through an angry adolescence and so on. Okay, versions of postmodernism I've touched on. Do I believe there's been adequate response to criticism of postmodernism and the family therapy literature?

J: *

M: Mmmm?

J: It presumes a familiarity with family therapy literature.

M: Yea, and I'm really not a family therapist. I interacted with some of these people most recently at Brief Therapy Conferences and then I've reviewed some of their work in handbook of Constructive Psychotherapy that Michael Hoyt has recently added to. And I really like what they're doing in terms of what they're calling nonhierarchical approaches and using the consulting team which does not mean a team of professionals who are consulting on the case but actually incorporating the client into that consultation. I would say that if if there's an inadequacy in the criticisms that I've read it comes back to more of a psychological need than a formalogical aspect for me. And this comes in part of my own clinical experience where with some clients I've tried to be as nonauthoritarian as collaborative as possible and I wasn't sensitive to specific client's needs for me to be an authority. And to call me doctor and to presume that I had answers that I would be quite willing to say I don't have who needed to

believe in Santa Claus. And the question is, 'am I willing to play Santa Claus for those clients who need a Santa Claus?' And so I would like to think that I'm flexible enough, and I certainly have enough reverence for Saint Nick in that tradition, that I mean I love to be Santa Claus at Christmas. I confess that with the clients that I've experimented in doing that with, it's very difficult for me to let go of the hope that they're going to outgrow their need for me to be an authority figure. At the same time they've taught me to distinguish between an authoritarian and an authoritative style. An authoritarian one being much more presumptuous, much more eager to take the role of, 'I have the answers and I know what's best for you.' Authoritative being willing to draw on my experience, my reflection, my intuition in authoritative way that this gives me the authorship of an opinion that the client can choose to weigh more or less heavily depending on their needs and whether it reads well with them emotionally. So that's the main criticism I can think of that I haven't read a lot about. The aspects of postmodernism, that are reflected in my work. I think what you've got here[5] speaks well. The only things I would add would be that with the relativism of postmodernism at least with the constructive spin on it, there is an emphasis on possibility. And George Kelly—I don't think it's coincidental that his main principle was the principle of constructive alternatives and this comes out of Vaihinger's work that the philosophy of as if that there are situations, one can always imagine alternatives. Okay. Now if you're walking down the aisle and you're getting married, this might not be the most favorable moment to consider constructive alternativism. You know, if you're responding to your reactions to trauma, I think your reactions to trauma

[5] Dr. Mahoney is referencing the interviewer's notes appearing underneath this question. The notes were: An acknowledgment of the complexity, relativity, and intersubjectivity of all human experience. Relativity of human belief systems. The lack of an essentialized self. A suspicion of dominant practices and ideologies.

the initial reactions if not hard wired, they're pretty primitive and powerful in the emotional sense. I think emotions are organizing processes that plug in pretty quickly in an anticipatory and a reactive sense and I think it's important that people be given freedom and encouragement to do the emotional processing that needs to be done in reaction to life challenges. But then in reaction to the reactions, I think the idea that there are always alternatives that there are possibilities when I'm counseling couples who are going through a divorce. Certainly once it's clear that the divorce is happening, the emotional trauma is a first priority and the supportiveness that they require. For some people it's sooner. And some people it comes later, that there are possibilities in this situation as unwanted as it was, perhaps as unexpected as it was, there are possibilities that present alternatives that are at least worth considering, even regardless of whether you consider them positive or negative. And I think this whole notion of possibility is is an aspect of constructive therapy that I like to emphasize. Steve de Shazer's miracle question, what would happen if a miracle happened while you were asleep and you didn't even know it, what would you notice that's different. I think that really touches on the dimension of possibility. And I think it's interesting that Piaget's last publications were on necessity and possibility that and he was doing it from a much more formal theoretical perspective, Piaget, but I think that many clients are are productively challenged by appropriately timed questions about what's possible and what's not. And oftentimes the very things they're working toward are the very things they believe to be and feel to be. And I think those are much the same thing, impossible. "It would be impossible for me to feel good about myself." "It would be impossible for me to recover from X, Y or Z ,"so that whole dimension of possibility is an aspect of post-modernism and

constructivism that I think is a rich field of potential harvest. Significant figures, I think I've mentioned most of them already. Factors that contribute to the criticism of post modern and so constructivists perspectives. One, they're becoming more popular. Two, they're beginning to challenge a very invested and empowered group who are not particularly eager to lose their investments or their empowerment. Three, I think much of the postmodern literature and certainly the deconstructionists part is written so obtusely. It's very difficult to understand and to I love a joke that I forget who told it to me originally but it's really enjoyed by my Italian friends and that is what do you get when you cross that is interbreed a deconstructionists with a member of the Mafia family and the answer is you get an offer you can't understand. A loan refused.

J: *

M: And I think I've responded to the coherence thing. These are great questions. You've probably got to get to work.

J: I'm going to be a few minutes late but that's okay. Thank you so much.

M: Oh, my pleasure.

END

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CHAPTER 4. GENERAL CONCLUSION

Unless the comment is made in clarifying context, it is not terribly illuminating to hear a public figure claim, "I'm a conservative." After all, if that was the only information provided, one would be left wondering if this was the 'compassionate conservatism' of George W. Bush, the 'courageous conservatism' of Elizabeth Dole, the juridical conservatism of William Rehnquist, or the moral and religious conservatism of Pope John Paul II. While the term 'conservatism' provides some contrast for making distinctions, using it as a means to distinguish one's positions without additional clarification would provide little more definition than claiming to be 'progressive' instead of 'traditional.'

Postmodernism, I would argue, is burdened by the same problem. It possesses so many nuances that it comes to mean something unique to many people across domains of knowledge. For instance, postmodernism claims that culture and society is entering a new age—post modernism. Postmodernism describes a philosophical stance that denies Truth from any perspective except the local. Architecturally, postmodernism favors pastiche or a blending of architectural styles. Within postmodern literature, the emphasis is upon non-linearity, indeterminacy, paradox, and playfulness. In the social sciences, those representatives who have criticized and broken with traditional theories are said to be postmodern. These examples to name a few.

Of course, a simple one sentence description of what constitutes the postmodern within a particular domain belies the depth and complexity of the subject and seems to be useful only as a point of departure for subsequent discussions. And yet, it appears that confusion as been present even in the midst of subsequent conversations. Perhaps it is for this

reason that Neimeyer (1997) suggested that meaningful dialogue will occur once an effort is made to identify "points of convergence and divergence" (p. 57). Identifying these distinctions has been part of the aim of this dissertation project.

However, beyond making distinctions and addressing criticism, this project was also motivated in part by the excitement that surrounds postmodern ideas and their potential implications and applications. This researcher remains curious regarding the level of interest in a phenomenon that fails to possess clear definition. What precisely are people seeing in postmodern thought that generates such spirited conversation and enthusiasm across multiple disciplines? Could it be in postmodern's lack of definition and breath of meanings that some theorists and therapists have found a new conceptual canvas that invites exploration and expression not available in other theories or approaches? Is it the lack of precision that gives people permission to voice an idea without fear of being accused of misrepresenting an idea? On the other hand, who among educators and professionals would not be concerned about the presence and application of a word that possesses troublesome ambiguities?

Yet, whether it is excitement or concern, a new paradigm or fashionable trend, the therapy literature does reveals an interest that started in the 80s and is present today. As previously mentioned, it was the aim of this dissertation project to study a portion of that interest by examining how postmodernism is understood within the domain of family therapy and also address the criticism that postmodernism encourages an attitude of 'anything goes.'

With regard to the first issue, this research identified specific categories and characteristics of postmodern thought expressed in family therapy literature. For instance, six

general categories emerged from the data in which postmodernism finds expression. In the core category of postmodern characteristics, twenty-six distinctions were identified.

This information is useful in the measure that it demonstrates that utilizing the term 'postmodern' by itself and without subsequent clarification is an ambiguous use of the word. The research also revealed a variety of postmodern characteristics present in the literature as well as showing a variety of positions regarding its perceived utility. For example, instances were found where postmodernism was used descriptively, prescriptively, or proscriptively.

The second half of this inquiry asked three contributors, Harlene Anderson, Kenneth Gergen, and Michael Mahoney, to address the criticism that postmodernism promotes an attitude of 'anything goes.' The responses of these contributors indicate that they do not view postmodernism as promoting an 'anything goes' attitude that is somehow divorced from all surrounding social and cultural constraints. It seems that because postmodernism represents a philosophical view that emphasizes multiple realities and perspectives while challenging assertions that claim absolute Truth or objectivity, some critics have concluded postmodernism must mean that 'anything goes.' The jump from multiple realities or other postmodern characteristics to 'anything goes' appears to be an exaggeration or an extreme interpretation of postmodernism. Whether an exaggeration or extreme interpretation, it does not appear that Anderson, Gergen, or Mahoney advocate either. In a similar vein, these contributors would not view postmodernism as representing a threat to scholarly research in family studies unless, as Gergen said, scholarly research was only defined as modernist research.

The effort of delineating between postmodernism and the related concepts of social constructionism and social constructivism was useful in the measure that the respondents briefly distinguished between the two. Yet additional efforts will be required before a clear description can be provided that articulates the relationship between postmodernism, social constructionism, and social constructivism through the voices of those whose works claim their characteristics. The research did yield some distinctions that may be useful as a means of separating emphases found in constructionism versus constructivism, specifically constructionism's emphasis upon the social and constructivism's consideration of cognitive processes occurring within the individual. Finally, while the contributors acknowledged using postmodern ideas, a complete examination relying upon each of their work would need to be engaged to fully address the question regarding the specific features utilized in their work.